

# Resurrection Faith

Romans 4:18-25

Resurrection Faith!

Faith that rests in the bedrock of the resurrection. Faith that understands that the Resurrection is THE pivotal moment in all of history. That which is truly good in this world, the resurrection makes eternal. And where there is hopelessness, the resurrection gives hope.

The resurrection is a statement by God. It is God's most powerful and determinative statement. And the resurrection is a demonstration of God's power. It is a power that surpasses every other power that confronts you. And because of this, the resurrection is the rock upon which your faith is built. Faith is what every Christian is called to live by.

**Romans 1:17** <sup>17</sup> For in it (Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,<sup>1</sup> as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."<sup>2</sup>

And faith is only so good as the object in which it trusts is strong. Ultimately, all saving faith must have God as its object. Faith looks to God's character, to God's Voice, and to God's Actions.

All of these culminate in the One moment of History: the Resurrection.

We have been in Romans 4. And Romans 4 explores and proclaims the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone.

Justification, God's declaration of the sinner being righteous, assures the one having been so justified, of the certainty of every true blessing.

Are you alone? Justification, gives you the right to belong in God's family.

Are you hurting? Justification means that God will wipe every tear from your eyes.

Are you anxious? Justification assures you of true and lasting peace.

Are you unhappy? Justification guarantees to you a fullness of joy that goes beyond your present ability to even imagine.

Does your life lack purpose? Justification gives meaning where there was none before.

Are you enslaved to sin? Justification promises freedom from every sin, no matter how powerful.

Does your life lack hope? Justification is a ray of hope where there was only darkness before. I could go on. But you get the picture.

And the Bible is clear: Jesus was raised for our Justification.

Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

I know you do!

You would not be here today, if you did not believe Jesus rose from the dead. Most of us have heard the arguments for the Reliability of the Resurrection. I have taught myself on those evidences. There is a place for them. If you are uncertain whether Jesus actually rose from the dead, your faith will surely be on shaky ground. But I do not want to speak today about the historical challenges to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I want to talk about a far more pressing challenge to your faith in the resurrection. This challenge is one that makes faith difficult for all of us, even those who are fully convinced by all the historical evidence. Believe in Jesus Christ, the Resurrected One. What could be easier? Well, on the one hand, nothing: there is no catch to the freeness of the Gospel. But, on the other hand, I completely concur with Martin Luther: "Faith is something arduous and difficult." In fact, it is so difficult that it is impossible with man, and only possible with God. Why is faith so arduous and difficult? Again, it is to Abraham that Paul turns to help us understand.

Read Romans 4:18-25.

Paul assumes that his readers know something of the life of Abraham from Genesis. I will make no such assumption, even though I know many of you are familiar with his story in Genesis. Abraham's story begins with him not being a man of faith. In fact, Joshua 24:2 makes clear that before God appeared to Abraham, he was a worshipper of other gods.

In Genesis 12, God appears to Abraham and gives him the great covenant promises.

**Genesis 12:1-3** Now the LORD said<sup>1</sup> to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."<sup>1</sup>

There are several aspects of the blessing that God promises.

But one particular blessing is that "of Abraham, God will make a great nation."

I find it interesting that the Bible does not use this moment to speak of Abraham's faith and justification. God commands Abraham to leave his family and country to go to the Land that God will show him: Part of the blessing is living in a Land of Blessing. But Abraham must believe God's promise. Why? because he goes. Faith must be present at this moment, or he would not have left his home.

The Bible tells us in Genesis 12:4 that Abraham is 75 years old when he leaves his home. Try to put yourself in Abraham's shoes. He doesn't have children of his own, but he does have a family. He lives among relatives and friends. Surely in 75 years he has established a life for himself. God tells him to leave all of this to go to a completely new land where he will be made into a great nation, and then become a blessing to all of the families of the earth. And Abraham goes! One might argue that at this point Abraham's faith is truly exceptional. But there is no, "And God credited to him as righteousness."

Why not?

It is almost as if this moment is insignificant, or at least, less significant, than what would come later. That should itself be challenging because we often think of justification occurring at the very first moment of faith. But there is no mention of Justification at this time. Nor does the Bible ever direct us back to this moment as the moment of Justification. We don't need to draw too many conclusions about this yet, but it should at least stir our thinking.

It takes some time, but Abraham eventually gets to the Promised Land. When he arrives, there are only two problems:

1. The Land is already inhabited by others.
2. There is a famine in the Land.

In Genesis 12:6, we are told that when Abraham arrived at the Promised Land, "the Canaanites were in the land."

Then, to add insult to injury, in Genesis 12:10 we are told, "there was a famine in the land." Both of these would be terribly discouraging.

Abraham had left so much to follow God's command.

How would you feel if once you got to the land, others were living in it?

How would you feel if that Land that you had been promised was not fruitful? You would feel robbed. You would feel betrayed.

This surely would have been a challenge to Abraham's faith.

And it was. Abraham and Sarah leave the Promised Land and go down to Egypt, where Abraham can hardly be said to have a strong faith. His faith in the promises of God was weakened to be sure. But this is not the point with which we are to identify with Abraham's faith, or weakness of faith, either.

Eventually, God brings Abraham back up from the land of Egypt.

At this point, Abraham is a wealthy and powerful man. He has so much wealth, in the form of flocks, that when he gets back to the Promised Land, the land is unable to support him and his nephew Lot.

Abraham graciously gives Lot the best of the Land. And they separate.

But again, if the Promised Land is so wonderful that Abraham is going to become a great nation on it, is it not a problem that the Land is not able to support Abraham and his Nephew?

At this point, God appears to Abraham.

**Genesis 13:14-16** <sup>14</sup> The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, <sup>15</sup> for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup> I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

At this point, one might wonder if God has some other agenda. Not to be crass, but it almost feels like God is a used car salesman. He is trying to make the car look new, when in truth, it is barely running and full of rust. God confirms the previous promise to Abraham that the Land will indeed be his, and that of his offspring, forever. If you don't like comparing God to a used car salesman, I will give you another image: It seems like God is pouring salt on a wound.

Abraham and Sarah do not have any children together. And it does not look like they will have any either. And God speaks directly into this problem, this obstacle to receiving the promise of blessing. Without explaining how, when, or why, God simply declares: Everything is going just as I planned. Everything will be just fine. No worries. Can you begin to see why faith is arduous and difficult? God does not give Abraham or Sarah anything but the bare strength of his word.

If you were to look at their life situation, things were becoming increasingly hopeless. When they started down this journey, they had faith, to be sure. But it was not a faith that had been tested by the “contrary evidence of experience.”

And as Abraham and Sarah’s life continued, the “contrary evidences of their experience only seemed to grow.” Have you ever felt that way before? **Have you ever felt that God’s promises to you feel more distant than when you first believed?** Then you have some understanding of how Abraham and Sarah were feeling.

What is amazing is that instead of accusing God of selling him empty promises, Abraham settles down and continues to worship God. In Genesis 13:18 we see that Abraham builds an altar to the LORD. He continues to worship God, in spite of the contrary evidence.

Worship is many things. But one of them is that it is an act of faith in God and his promises. Worship is a choice that we make to continue believing in God’s promises.

But again, there is no “And God credited it to him as righteousness.” The narrative simply passes this moment by as if it is only a blip on the radar.

Time passes.

**The longer that Abraham goes without actually seeing and experiencing the fulfillment of the promises, the more difficult faith becomes.**

Abraham simply lives life.

By the way, he rescues his nephew by fighting and winning a battle against several kings. But, what we really want to have happen does not happen. Sarah does not have a child.

Time begins to wear upon Abraham. His faith is weakened. He begins to doubt the goodness and faithfulness of God. Now, we can begin to see the arduousness of living a life of faith. When the circumstances of your life, and your logic and reason, all tell you that the promise is a bunch of hooey, you begin to begin to see why faith is difficult.

We often think that God is somehow absent in all of this. We think that God has abandoned us. We fail to find any purpose in the struggles we are experiencing. And many times, we feel guilt that we are even having these inner struggles, as if to ever struggle means that we don’t actually have faith. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As I read the account of Abraham’s next encounter with God, I want you to feel with Abraham his frustration and hopelessness.

Turn to Genesis 15.

**Genesis 15:1-3** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

Pretty awesome and encouraging words, right? Not to Abraham. To him they are empty. At the point where it matters most to Abraham, having a child with Sarah, God has not fulfilled his promise.

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue<sup>1</sup> childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

Understand, Abraham's frustration and despair are only produced because of his faith in the promises. If Abraham had not given all to find the hidden treasure, he would not have the sense of hopelessness that he now feels.

"Uh, excuse me Lord, here is the thing, you keep saying that, but my life is not changing. I don't see it happening. These are nice sounding words, but one begins to wonder if that is all that they are. Nice sounding words."

The time between God first calling Abraham and when Sarah actually bears a child is 25 years. This encounter in Genesis 15 is some 12 or 13 years before that.

But it is still a long time! And, by this time, both Abraham and Sarah are past the age of child bearing.

Now we have come to **the point of greatest hopelessness** in Abraham's journey of faith. All of the evidence that Abraham can see points to the impossibility of God's promises actually coming true. In order for the promises to even begin coming to fruition, Abraham must have a child. And the prospects of that happening are zero. It is important to see how hopeless things are at this point. The chances are not small, they are non-existent.

At this point, we need to pause in the flow to deal with a tangential but related question:

If Abraham had truly passed the age of being able to sire children, how is it that after Sarah dies, he is able to have children with another wife? Genesis 25 states clearly that Abraham took another wife named Keturah and that she bore him another six children. Also, in Genesis 25:7 we are told that Abraham lives to be 175 before he dies. So, in reality he is only in middle age at this time.

But, here in Romans 4:19 we are told that Abraham's body was "as good as dead." The writer of Hebrews agrees, "and him as good as dead".

If Abraham's body was, "as good as dead", as both Romans and Hebrews tell us, how is it possible for him to live another 75 years and to bear more children to another wife?

This is a good question that merits some explanation. Some have tried to say that the miracle is really only in Sarah's womb. Of course, Sarah was herself past the age of child bearing. But Romans and Hebrews are both explicit. Abraham's body was also "as good as dead."

And, to be honest, that is the point of the story: Everything in Abraham's experience tells him that it is impossible for God's promises to become reality.

John Calvin gives the best answer when argues that God did a miracle in both Abraham and Sarah. And that the miracle in Abraham's body was enduring. It was not merely a one time deal. In Sarah, it seems to be that Isaac would be the only child she would ever bear. But in

Abraham, God restores whatever it was that was broken. Abraham could not have children, and he knew it. Sarah could not have children, and she knew it. Therefore, the promises that God had previously given were now hopeless. Previously, the promises just sounded great!

Think about it, who does not at one time or another fall for nice sounding promises? We all have. But, once the promise is proven to be a lie, by the hard road of experience, we get wiser. Burn me once, shame on you... burn me twice, shame on me. Right? Well, Abraham can now see his situation for what it is: hopeless. He is not being a pessimist. He sees the situation for what it truly is. Don't be fooled by those who want to turn faith into optimism. Believe in yourself. You just gotta believe. And good things will happen.

Biblical faith is not optimism. I have been called an optimist. At one point in my life, my nickname was "Happy". Fair enough. I like being an optimist. But biblical faith is not optimism.

Abraham is fully aware that there is no reason for optimism. What happens at this moment of hopelessness in Abraham's life?

Look again at Genesis 15:

<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him:

"This man shall not be your heir; your very own son<sup>1</sup> shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

When I was preparing this sermon, and read these verses, I could hear in my head the voice coming over the loudspeaker just before a prized boxing match.

"In this corner, we have the heavy-weight champion of the world. His record is 100 and 0. He has never lost. Every time he has ever been in the ring, he has won. No contender has ever lasted for a whole fight. This champion is the full weight of the history of your experience of failed promises."

"And in the other corner, we have the challenger. Who is this challenger? We don't actually know. In fact, it is only the voice of one claiming to be God. He promises victory."

Each of us has these two voices in our head.

The one is the voice of experience.

The other is the voice of God and his promise to you.

Now, you are ready to hear Romans 4:18-19.

<sup>18</sup> 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."  
<sup>19</sup> 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.

Faith is arduous and difficult because your life experience is a powerful force in determining what you believe to be true. How about you? Abraham spent 25 years of not receiving the promise. And instead of giving up his faith, he believed, and God credited it to him as righteousness. He did not weaken in faith does not mean that Abraham never grew discouraged or that his faith was always strong. Even after this moment, he will struggle to bring about the promise in his own power. His faith was not always perfect.

But, when push comes to shove, when he is directly confronted with the promise of God, "against all hope, he believes the Word of God."

20 No distrust 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.

Verse 20 seems to indicate that "distrust" was present in Abraham's heart. But that distrust does not win the day. He continues to believe in the faithfulness of God concerning his promise to him of offspring and blessing. He grew strong in his faith. Faith grows stronger as it is exercised. It is a muscle. The longer the list of reasons to not trust God, the stronger faith must be to trust God.

Abraham gave glory to God. That simply means that Abraham trusted in the goodness, power, and faithfulness of God to fulfill his promise. That is the best way for you to give glory to God. Trust him. Abraham's being "fully convinced" is itself a choice. It is not a feeling. It is a choice, to believe.

Calvin is very helpful, "This does not imply that there was no inward conflict with doubt in Abraham's mind. It only says, that his faith triumphed over all difficulties. 'The mind,' says Calvin, 'is never so enlightened that there are no remains of ignorance, nor the heart so established that there are no misgivings. With these evils of our nature,' he adds, 'faith maintains a perpetual conflict, in which conflict it is often sorely shaken and put to great stress; but still it conquers, so that believers may be said to be in ipsa infirmitate firmissimi'." Hodge

In infirmity, I am firm. God rejoices when his people trust him, when they have no other reason to trust him except his word. When you have the greatest doubts in your mind, you have the greatest opportunity for exercising faith in God and his promises to you.

22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."  
23 But  
the words  
"it was counted to him"



Whatever your struggle today, you can experience more. But you will never experience all, not on this side of the resurrection. In conversion we experience a spiritual resurrection in the depths of our heart. But our bodily resurrection still awaits us. We are exiles and strangers here on earth. Do not believe the lie that if you believe enough, you can bring heaven to earth. That is a twisting of the promise.

Instead, expect seasons where your lived experience makes a mockery of your faith. Do not look at these seasons as without purpose. It is in these seasons that you might most glorify God. Because it is in these seasons that “in hope, against all hope, you believe.”

**1 Peter 1:6-7** <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**God cares more about your faith in him, than he does your present experience of his blessing.**

But, O don't you ever think for a moment that the blessing will not be yours. The Spirit's work in you is a down payment, a guarantee of the fullness to come. In the resurrection, God has spoken, the fullness of blessing is for all who believe.

Remember the Resurrection!

Remember that Jesus is now living in interceding for you!

Fix your eyes on him, The Author and Finisher of your Faith!

Faith may be arduous and difficult.

But by the power of the resurrection working in you, you may

“In hope believe against hope”