

Faith in the God who Gives Life

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 11*, March 8, 2015

Romans 4:13–25 (ESV adapted)

¹³ For **the promise to Abraham** and his **offspring** (seed) that he would be **heir of the world** (*kosmos*) did not come through law but through **righteousness of faith**.

¹⁴ For if it is the ones from law who are to be the heirs, faith(fullness) is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For **the law works toward wrath**, but where there is no law there is no transgression of law. ¹⁶ That is why it is **from faith(fullness)**, in order that the **promise may rest on grace** and be firm to **all** his offspring – not only to the one who is from the law but also to the one who is **from Abraham's faith**, who is **father of us all**, ¹⁷ as it is written, "***I have made you father of many nations*** (*Gentiles*)" [Gen 17:5] – in the presence of **the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist**.

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.*" [Gen 15:5]

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** (dying) of Sarah's womb [Gen 17:17; 18:11]. 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**.

²² That is why his faith was "*counted to him as righteousness.*" [Gen 15:6] ²³ But the words "*it was counted to him*" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who **believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord**, ²⁵ who was **delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification**.

Genesis 12:2-3 God's first promise to Abraham

² "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. ³ ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 12:7

⁷ Then the LORD (*Yahweh*) appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land (Heb. *arets*, ground, earth)." So he built there an altar to the LORD (*Yahweh*)

Genesis 15:5-6

⁵ And he (God) brought him (Abraham) 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." ⁶ And he believed the LORD (*Yahweh*), and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 17:5

⁵ "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations (Heb, *goyim*, Gentiles)."

Genesis 22:17-18

¹⁷ "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven ... ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations (Gentiles) of the earth (*arets*) be blessed"

Romans 8:32

³² He (God) who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

What is God Doing? What Sort of God is He?

We might think, 'Why so much about Abraham? Tell us about Jesus!' Paul knows that if Jesus is cut off from Scripture and Israel, nothing about him makes sense or has any power. It is because of all that God has done from Abraham through Israel to Jesus that we can see what is at stake in the events of the Gospel. Events require context to manifest meaning.

What Paul discovers is that when you go back to the start – the creator God making a promise to a very human man, challenging him to believe the impossible, counting his trust in God as establishing a right covenant relationship with God, and then God being righteous/ faithful to fulfill the impossible promise – you get to the heart of the Gospel.

It's this relationship of 'righteousness' (*dikaiosyné*) and 'faith(fullness)' (*pistis*) that's the core. God's righteousness in faithfully fulfilling his promises by his action in Jesus' faithfulness on the cross and his resurrection bringing forgiveness and new life, embodies a new expression of God's promises, calling us to faith/trust that he counts as righteousness, a right relationship. God is the main actor. We respond, receive, imitate, learn, grow.

But What about the Torah?

Paul, trained as a Pharisee, lived his whole life within the Torah. But the Torah starts with Genesis, long before Moses. The law of Moses and 'works of law' are very important but limited inside the larger story. It defines transgressions. Scripture shows how it defines Israel's failure, the basis of God's wrath, Israel's exile. It was given to Israel, but the promise was for all nations. Paul lived with 'works of law' (circumcision, purity, Sabbath) that defined Jews against Gentiles, obedient Jews against lax Jews, a pure remnant.

But God told Abraham he had made him the father of nations (Gentiles). Ultimately the 'land' his family would inherit was not tiny Canaan, but the world (*kosmos*). Childless Abraham and Sarah needed a child that did not and could not exist by any human means. They needed the dying of their own aged bodies to be somehow reversed.

God acted precisely in Abraham and Sarah to show who he is. He is the Creator who calls (then and now) into existence what doesn't exist. He is the one who gives life in creation and life to the dead – resurrection. He makes promises that are impossible to us, but fulfills them in his righteous faithfulness. We learn to trust/believe that he is able to do it!

Thus the heart of Torah/law itself is not about a small pure group keeping commandments correctly. It is about the whole world – Jews and Gentiles. The Gospel of the Messiah Jesus draws in all peoples and thus fulfills what God was doing in the Torah.

Abraham's Faith and Jesus' Faithfulness

In making a covenant with Abraham, the righteous, faithful God makes promises that draw Abraham into faith, and God counts it as righteousness. Through the ages of scripture, that individual story is loaded with all the transgression and brokenness that the law revealed. The promises are expanded through Moses, David, the prophets: deliverance, forgiveness, new life, God's kingdom, God's coming, God's Messiah/King, the suffering servant bearing our sins, the world to come, resurrection life. Impossible to keep!

But in Jesus Messiah (God-Israel-humanity), all of these are brought into focus by God in a way as surprising as Isaac was to Sarah. By resurrection God showed that Jesus was God's self in action. But we are drawn in. It was our sin that God took on himself in Jesus' faithfulness on the cross. It was because God wanted to draw all people into a right/reconciled relationship with him that he created resurrection life in Jesus. He calls us to faith. He is able.