

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 4: 17b-22

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 4. We will read the 2nd half of verse 17 to verse 22 today.

Yesterday, according to the passage in Genesis, we looked at how Abraham, on his journey of faith, experienced God as the one who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did. Today, we return to the book of Romans and, following Paul's line of thought, we will see how Paul develops the truth and application of justification by faith from the passage in Genesis.

Verse 17b: “who is the father of us all , (as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’)”

Abraham believed in God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did. He believed in God's promise—that God had already made him the father of many nations—and so he became the father of all who believe. For God changed his name from Abram to Abraham in order that he might be the father of many nations, that all the peoples of the earth might be blessed through him.

Although the Jews also follow Abraham, they only recognize Abram as their exalted father and have not seen that God had already changed his name to Abraham, so that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him. The faith journey that Abraham walked was meant to help all his descendants of faith, and that includes you and me.

Verse 18: “who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’”

“Who, contrary to hope, in hope believed,”—this is exactly the principle of faith. If a person has not yet reached the end of himself, if the natural man and the flesh are still active, there is no need for faith, and one will try every possible way to solve problems on his own. Therefore, God will bring us to a point where, after we have completely lost hope, the function of faith can finally begin to manifest. Man’s end is God’s beginning, but for God to begin, man must have faith and look to Him in order to see how God begins to work.

When Abraham was without hope, he remembered that God had pointed to the stars in the sky and said, “So shall your descendants be.” God’s word was the anchor of Abraham’s faith; it was God’s word that strengthened his faith and enabled him to remain steady and unshaken amid the storm of doubt in his mind. Because God had already promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars and would shine in the dark night sky, he continued to hold on to hope, and in this way, he truly became the father of many nations.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are the same. God often brings us into situations where there seems to be no hope, where it feels as though there is no way out. Yet deep within, there remains a sense of stability. This sense needs to be anchored in the promises of God’s word—His word must become the source of our faith.

Verse 19: “And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.”

When Abraham was nearly a hundred years old, he received circumcision and also heard God’s promise that he would have a son through Sarah, and that his name would be called Isaac. Abraham was already old, and he could not believe it—so he laughed. When God visited Abraham in the form of a man, Sarah was in the tent and overheard God foretelling that at the appointed time she would give birth to

Isaac. Sarah thought of how she was already past childbearing age, and she too laughed. Both husband and wife could not believe it, and both, without planning it, laughed.

Paul read the same Old Testament passage as we do, yet he said that Abraham's faith did not weaken. It seems Paul's understanding is far higher than ours. What we see is that Abraham couldn't believe, but what Paul saw was the laughter that came from Abraham's unbelief. Let's put ourselves in Abraham's shoes—when we say we can't believe, it's because it doesn't align with our experience, our knowledge, or our reason, so we find it hard to believe. However, even in that state of unbelief, we still very much hope that this unbelievable thing could happen to us—that is a heart of joyful willingness. Paul says this is a sign that faith is not weak.

We all mistakenly think that a great man of faith wears a halo on his head, is clothed in bright, pure fine linen, has a strong and resolute smile on his face, and shines with light, just like Moses coming down from Mount Sinai. But such an understanding is completely wrong. Our father of faith was someone who, in the midst of unbelief, seemed to have no other option but to cling to God's promise, willing for God's promise to be fulfilled in him. He didn't know how it would be fulfilled, because it didn't align with his reasoning, but he still held tightly to God's promise—that is faith that is not weak.

We often idealize Abraham, the father of faith, so much that we feel he is far removed from our present reality. This is a mistaken understanding. Abraham was just like us; the difference is that even in his unbelief, he was still willing to hold tightly to God's promise.

Verse 20: “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,”

Paul faithfully recorded the true condition of Abraham. Abraham also had moments of unbelief, but because he continually looked to God's promise, the promise brought the supply of life, so that even in unbelief his heart did not doubt. Instead,

he became more firmly reliant on the provision of God's word, which strengthened his heart and enabled him to give glory to God.

Perhaps from Paul's description, we can summarize the secret of how Abraham became the father of our faith: it was when he faced a situation of utter hopelessness—

First, he wholeheartedly fixed his eyes on God, not on the circumstances, and not even on his own situation, but steadfastly focused on God Himself.

Second, he grasped the promises of God's word—promises he had already received in following God before. Today, when we come before the Bible, it is the same; we cannot merely know the black-and-white text, for such words alone do not help us. Rather, we must read the Scripture as God's timely speaking to us—that is, to read the logia of Scripture as logos, and then transform that logos into rhēma. Just as John 6:63 says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." The "words" in this verse, in the Greek, is rhēma—God's timely word that brings life to us.

Third, he did not allow his unbelief to turn into doubt in his heart. The word of life can bring supply, encouragement, comfort, and support. Even in his unbelieving state, he did not let doubt take root in his heart. Dear brothers and sisters, it is the same for us today. When we face difficulties, we often follow human reasoning, and the more we look, the more hopeless and doubtful we become, allowing doubt to take root in our hearts. When this happens, our hearts become hardened and unable to open to God. We must learn to overcome the limits of our reasoning and receive the support and help of God's word of life from the Bible, not allowing doubt to take root in our hearts.

Fourth, he strengthened his heart with the word of life. He knew that the human heart is easily swayed and unstable according to circumstances, so God's word must become the steadfast strength within his heart.

Fifth, he gave glory to God, especially in times of unbelief, praising and worshiping God even more. If we learn to continually give glory to God, God's glory will help us

overcome our own limitations and make it easier for us to connect with Him. A person who regularly thanks, praises, and gives glory to God is one who often meets with the Lord, and each encounter brings the light of God's presence, which helps the person turn toward God and look to Him alone.

Paul in this verse tells us the secret by which Abraham's faith was able to remain steadfast.

Verse 21-22: "and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness.'"

Abraham continually exercised his faith by looking to God alone and holding tightly to God's promises until he could wholeheartedly believe that God's promises would surely be fulfilled. At the appointed time of God, Isaac was born. Genuine wholehearted belief actually grows out of a place of unbelief. When we find ourselves unable to believe, we must train ourselves to grasp that small measure of calmness, stability, and rest within our hearts—that is being connected to God's promise. Through that feeling, we immerse ourselves in the supply of God's word and practice the five principles mentioned earlier until we can fully believe. In this way, we can overcome our limitations in matters we struggle to believe.

At this point, Paul declares, "this was credited to him as righteousness." Paul's teaching on Abraham's justification by faith does not stop at Genesis 15, when God first credited Abraham as righteous because of faith—that was only the beginning of justification by faith. This kind of faith must continue until Abraham can fully believe, and only then would the promised Isaac be born.

According to the Genesis account, after God led Abraham to count the stars in the sky and credited him as righteous because of faith, Abraham experienced some failures. He tried to produce offspring through his own flesh and fathered Ishmael. Then God came to him again, establishing the covenant of circumcision and reaffirming His promise. Afterward, Abraham welcomed God as a friend and stood as an intercessor for his nephew Lot. Abraham also had to face his own hidden

weaknesses, interceding for the women in Abimelech's household who were barren—a shameful intercession for Abraham. These were all necessary experiences before he could fully believe. At that time, Isaac's birth was brought forth, fulfilling God's promise, and God credited Abraham as righteous.

Dear brothers and sisters, the birth of Christ within us must also go through the same process. In His mercy, God often brings us into impossible situations. When we find ourselves unable to believe, God gives us promises so that we can learn to exercise ourselves to hold tightly to His promises, not looking at our surroundings, and overcoming the limits of our rational thinking—that is, even in unbelief, we are still willing to joyfully face every circumstance around us. Through the supply of God's promised word, we can truly come to full-hearted belief. At that moment, the time of life comes, and Christ can grow within us. This is just as Paul says in Galatians 4:19, where he shares that he suffers again in birth pains until Christ is formed in their hearts.

Abraham's wholehearted belief ultimately led to the fulfillment of the promise with the birth of Isaac, just as New Testament believers, after undergoing various trials and circumstances, finally allow Christ to be formed in their hearts. At that time, the fruit of the Spirit can be manifested in the believer—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for placing before us the life of Abraham following You and, through Paul's interpretation, revealing to us the truth and application of justification by faith. Help us, when we face difficulties in life, to learn to fix our eyes on Christ and hold firmly to the promises of Christ's word. Let our hearts be neither weak nor doubtful but steadfastly and continuously receive the supply of Your word. And throughout this process, may we frequently offer You thanks and worship, giving glory to You, so that we can bring ourselves before You until we can fully believe in Your promises and let Christ be formed in our hearts. Lord, we know this is a testing process and not an easy one. Please grant us faith, for You are Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, so that in the end we may receive Your promises and testify to Your glory in our lives. Bless my daily life, and I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.