

We serve the God of Hope

By

Elder Enoch Ofori Jnr
(Sabbath Sermon, 27th Jan. 2018)

Text: Rom. 4:17-25

Bad Times, a Showcase for True Faith

Sometimes in the midst of trials and tribulations life seems like a long dark hole of hopelessness with no light in sight. There appears to be no silver lining in the cloud – it’s all gloom, no glimmer of hope.

Yet it’s at such times of abject hopelessness, when conditions are bleak and the future is looking even bleaker, that God who dwells in His eternal light of glory, looks for sublime faith to work His wonders in our lives. This is a faith which refuses to give in to despair or impossibility. An iron-clad, unyielding faith!

This was the kind of faith God knew Abraham for. He is not called ‘the father of the faithful’ (Rom. 4:16) just to honour him; it’s not a mere spiritual honorific title. He ‘earned’ it; he demonstrated it. He went through the mill and came out with even finer faith. His faith glowed; it stood firm, refusing to buckle under the weight of undeniable impossibility. He thus became the father of the faithful, the father of those who are FULL OF FAITH in God. He modelled for us the kind of faith God requires of us. That’s the only kind of faith which pleases and impresses God.

Abraham’s faith did not take into account rational assessments of his dire condition but flatly overlooked them. He had the promise of God upon his life that he had been made the “father of many nations” – and that to a childless ‘father’ in his old age!

Talk about sheer improbability, with irrationality into the bargain, and that’s it! The prophetic word of promise “I have made thee a father of many nations” came to Abraham at a time when he did not even have a single child. Moreover, he was advanced in age. So too was his wife Sarah, who was past the age of childbearing (see Heb. 11:11).

Nevertheless, Abraham would not be dissuaded from his faith in God by his bodily weakness as well as the dead state of Sarah’s womb.

What was Abraham’s secret? What were the bases of his faith?

God Knows no Impossibility

Abraham knew the God he had believed. He had no doubts whatsoever what He was capable of doing:

“(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before Him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17).

“He makes alive the dead”! That was what caught his interest and dispelled his fears at once. Death is not the end of the road for God. He has power over death to make the dead live again!

But much more than power over death, nothingness is not a problem to Him. He calls non-existent things into existence. He creates substance out of nothing:

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb. 11:3).

Abraham Knows no Impossibility

The God of Abraham is the God of *creatio ex nihilo*! Creation out of nothing! For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9).

So then, Abraham could only continue to have hope in God’s declaration of his having innumerable descendants when evidently he had no basis for hope as far as his reproductive capabilities was concerned:

“Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be” (Rom 4:18).

The “hope” Abraham believed in came in the form of a promise – he would become the father of many nations. Yet as he remained childless, without even a child by his wife Sarah, the promise flew in the face of his age-ravaged virility. The promise was not fulfilled immediately; it had a gestation period – during which Abraham continued to believe.

How did he manage to maintain his faith even as the fulfilment of the promise delayed?

“And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb” (Rom 4:19).

Although his reproductive organs and those of his wife were “dead”, sterile, incapable of making babies through sheer old age, the same could not be said of Abraham’s faith. Weak in body but “not weak in faith”!

So things may go from bad to worse, the devil may even do his worst, but keep your faith from being weakened by the dispiriting things you see around you. Amid his tribulations, Job declared in faith unfazed by the dismal facts of his life: “I know that My Redeemer liveth, and that He

shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26).

The worm-destroyed skin is a fresh body in the presence of God – the God who calls into existence things that do not exist.

So Abraham’s weak body only gave him more grounds to trust in God even more. He was unwavering in faith:

“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20).

Abraham believed the Lord absolutely and did not allow unbelief to punch holes in God’s promise to him – to cause him to see the utter illogicality of it. Instead, he did the opposite! He was “strong in faith, giving glory to God”.

His faith never abated even as his body weakened. That is to say, his faith grew stronger in reverse parallel to his weakening body. His faith saw the promise approaching, embraced it and gave God the glory! He thanked God in advance of the actual receipt of the promise much the same way you would thank a benefactor who writes you a postdated cheque if only you consider him to be credible!

He had no reason to doubt God; His credibility was beyond question:

“And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom 4:21).

This is the God who “cannot lie” (Tit. 1:2) and therefore every promise of his will be fulfilled (1 Thess. 5:24). You and I can absolutely trust Him and begin to give Him glory in advance of the fulfilment of His promises to us. The praise will not go waste! He’s both willing and able to perform. The ‘advance’ praise then is our own personal testimony that we regard Him as absolutely credible – and that He’s able to deliver!

Faith Begets Righteousness

The result of Abraham’s faith was that God was pleased with him, and He considered his show of unflagging faith a righteous act. “It was imputed to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:22).

But it was not written in scripture for his own reading or edification but for our sakes:

*“Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;
“But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom 4:23-24).*

Father Abraham's God who creates substance out of nothing and restores life to the dead is our very own God too by faith! That very act of trust in Him amounts to righteousness in His sight, and He credits it to us accordingly.

At this stage, we enter the realm of possibilities where our faith counts no promise of God as improbable or incapable of being fulfilled. Here, every blessing of God is bound to come to life and into being. The 'deadness' in every area of our lives will resurrect and every hope in God's promise come true, provided we continue to believe in Him that raised Yeshua, our Master, from the dead.

We serve a God of undying hope with whom all things are possible. Amen!