

The Faith of Abraham

Last week we learned about the blessing of Abraham, the father of faith, which we will inherit as well. We Christians have the great grace to inherit the Kingdom of God by faith. We also learned that the Holy Spirit enables us to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God when we live in this world. All of these are graces by faith, aren't they? Now, I would like to learn together what faith is and what kind of faith is required through the faith of Abraham today.

i) Abraham believed in the resurrection God who gives life to the dead.

Look at verse 17. It says, "As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not." God was so pleased with Abraham's faith that He designated him as the father of many nations. We would like to learn from this faith of Abraham.

First, Abraham believed in God who gives life to the dead. This faith is found in Genesis 22. God tested Abraham. One day God commanded Abraham to offer his only son, Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2). Isaac was his only son, whom he finally got at the age of 100. In response to God's command, Abraham prepared his only son early the next morning and took him to the land of Moriah. When Abraham arrived at the place where God had commanded him to go, he built an altar there, laid out firewood, tied up his son Isaac, and placed him on the firewood on the altar (Gen. 22:9). Then Abraham reached down and took a knife, ready to slay his son (Gen. 22:10). I really wonder what I would do if God told me to kill Kenta and burn him to the ground; I would be horrified just to think that my son, whom I worked so hard to raise until he was 19 years old, could die. But Abraham obeyed God's command silently without saying a word.

Hebrews 11:19 says, "Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death." Do we really believe that God can bring the dead back to life? But Abraham, the father of faith, believed in God. Our illnesses, painful relationships, and financial problems may seem big, but I believe that through these problems we can believe in God who can bring the dead back to life. God tested Abraham's faith by giving him a great trial with Isaac. And when his faith passed the test, God returned his beloved Isaac to him. Genesis 22:11-12, "But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. (11) "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I

know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”(12) God approved Abraham's faith and provided a ram in Isaac's place. If we are going through a trial right now, let us offer the problem to God with faith.

I am experiencing confusion and difficulties these days after having my children meet their father in Okinawa. My ex-husband is controlling Kenta and Taishi and I feel as if he is trying to take away my children I struggled so hard to raise. This has caused me to panic and lose control of my work. But I realize that I still can't fully believe in God, the Father, who also brings the dead back to life. Just as Abraham boldly offered his son Isaac to God, I want to have the faith to entrust the lives of my children to God. I am sure that God will see my faith and prepare a ram for me.

ii) Abraham believed in "God the Creator who made something out of nothing.

Abraham went from being a childless man to having a son, Isaac, at the age of 100. This was the creation of "something" out of "nothing. Abraham experienced our God who calls into existence something that does not exist. Genesis 17:4-5, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations (4). No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations (5)."

Abraham was 99 years old at the time and his name was Abram. The name was a common name that meant a respected father. But the reality is that he had not a single child. This is the state of 'nothing'. To Abram, God names him 'Abraham', the father of many nations'. It means "You are many, and your descendants are many," and God commanded him to call himself Abraham from now on.

I imagined that like this: Abraham went to the Tokyo Family Court. He said, "Excuse me. I want to change my name from 'respected father' to 'father of many nations'." And the judge says, "Yes, sir. I've got it. How many children do you have now?" Abram replies, "None". From such a state of nothingness, God commanded him to live, claiming, 'I have many descendants!' This may be called 'unorthodox, bigmouth, or all talk'. However, God did what He said one year later. From nothing, God created something great.

And I remember it was in the year 2000. President Son of Soft Bank announced that "My business goal is to provide every Japanese citizen with a mobile phone. At that time, cell phones were beginning to be popular and were very expensive. So to me, it seemed like a ridiculous thing for President Son to be saying. However, President Son's words came true recently, the use of mobile phones had reached the point where everyone, from children to the seniors, had one. This was accomplished in just 20 years. God our Father, in whom we believe, is incomparably greater than President Son. He is the

Creator of this world, the One who rules the past, the present, and the future. God creates something great out of nothing. I hope we all can grow to the glory of God by faith.

What problem do you have that seems impossible to fix? In my case, there is no reconciliation. As you all know, Kenta and Taishi have a very bad relationship. They spend every day together, not saying a word to each other even though they are brothers and live under the same roof. It is really sad. I want to pray. "God! There is no peace and reconciliation in our home. Please create peace and reconciliation. "

(iii) Abraham had hope even when there was no hope.

Look at verse 18. "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him." Abraham hoped when there was nothing to hope for. Hebrews 11:1-2, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.(1) This is what the ancients were commended for."(2) Abraham was 75 years old when he was called by God to be the father of many nations. For the next 25 years, Abraham hoped that God's Word would be fulfilled. It must not have been easy for him to continue to believe in things he could not see and things that would not produce results. But finally God gave Abraham the promised Isaac when he was 100 years old. We cannot have hope in ourselves. But we can put our hope in God who fulfils his promises.

It is difficult for parents raising children to keep hope in their children. The same may be true for teachers. It is not easy to teach students or students with inappropriate behavior. It may also be difficult to have hope for the rehabilitation of those with criminal records. But we Christians can have hope for them because we believe in God. When I hear the testimonies of those who are involved in the rehabilitation of troubled youth and prisoners, I realized that God will transform them.

My father lives in Guilford, Vancouver, and he is 77 years old. He was very abusive to my mom, my sister and me. When he found out that my sister and I were going to church, he tore up the Bible and burned it in the fire. He broke in during the church service and took us away. My mother, my sister and I prayed for more than 37 years for my father's salvation. God gave the prayers of the three of us his great answer this past September. My father honestly accepted the guided prayer of my sister, who had become a pastor, and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. I remembered that I had prayed for 37 years, thankful for this wondrous moment. It was difficult for me and my family to pray with faith because it was an invisible fact that my father confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. Even though I prayed, my father's violence against my mother escalated and they had to

divorce and our family all suffered during the divorce process. However, now I realized that God was deeply involved in my father's life after the divorce. Through this suffering, my father finally confessed Jesus as Lord, and I am so thankful for that. God answered our prayers in His time. **Romans 10:10, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (10). As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame (11)."** I thank God for the fulfillment of these powerful words in my family.

(iv) Abraham's faith did not weaken.

Look at verse 19. **"Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead –since he was about a hundred years old– and that Sarah's womb was also dead."** Abram was 75 years old when God called him and promised that he would be the father of all the nations from his own descendant, but he did not have children until he was 99 years old. In fact, Abram and his wife Sarah were already so weak that there was no hope for them at all. But Abraham's faith did not weaken, and he continued to believe in God. Look at verse 20: **"Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promises of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God."** The Bible says that Abraham's faith was not weakened, but strengthened. Why? The reason is that Abraham did not believe in himself, but in "God's promises. God's promises are plentiful throughout the Bible. We Christians do not believe in our human nature, our rich family background, our high education, our health, or the vast amount of information on Google, but we believe in God's Word. When we believe God's Word, our faith is not weakened, but strengthened. **Romans 10:17, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."** When Abraham moved to Egypt and was afraid and lied about his wife Sarah being his sister, God visited him with the Word. After saving his nephew Lot from war and winning a great victory, Abraham was afraid of his enemies, but God came to him with the Word. God also reminded Abraham of the Word when he could not wait for Isaac and gave birth to Ishmael from his female servant Hagar. In the pinch points of Abraham's life, there are always scenes that remind us of God's promises. Abraham believed God's words, 'He will make me a father of many nations', and when his faith weakened, he always remembered God's words.

How about us? Are we listening to God's Word? Are we listening to God's voice? We can hear God's voice during these times of worship, when we read the Bible alone, and when we pray. **John 10:27-28, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me (27). I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them**

out of my hand."(28) Since we all are the sheep of Jesus Christ, let us practice listening to the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Verses 21-22, "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised (21). This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness (22)." Abraham's faith was strengthened because he believed God's promise, and God credited this faith of Abraham as righteousness. Having been accepted as righteous, Abraham received the Kingdom of God as his inheritance. Verses 23-25, "The words, "It was credited to him" were written not for him alone,(23), but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,(24) He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (25)." This history of Abraham's faith in God who raises the dead is our basis for believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ after His death on the cross. In Paul's day, there were already many people who witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, many heretics spread rumors that Jesus was not resurrected. But, we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because Abraham believed in God who could bring Isaac back to life even if he were to die. The basis of our resurrection faith is inherited from Abraham, the father of faith.

We learn from the faith of Abraham today! Abraham's life is wonderful. I want all of us to live a life like Abraham. With the help of the Holy Spirit living in us, we too can live a life like Abraham. God is raising us up like Abraham for His purpose. I believe that all of us here are experiencing this Father God. I met you all in Vancouver in 2011. Many of you remember me from that time. My faith was weak and I was frightened because my faith was weakened. But now I have grown a little more than before. I am sure that you are all more faithful now than you were 10 years ago, and your relationship with God has deepened more. Therefore, there is hope for the future.

Abraham believed in God who created something out of nothing. He also believed in the God of resurrection who gives life to the dead. Even when there was no hope, he continued to hope in God. Abraham believed in the Word of God's promise and his faith did not weaken. I pray that all of us will inherit Abraham's faith.

Beloved Heavenly Father. Thank you for making Abraham to have a great faith. We want to have this kind of faith too. Please guide us with the Holy Spirit so that we can walk with faith in the various problems that are happening in our lives today. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.