

Faith and Action

Genesis 18

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the facts that make it difficult for us to realize how dependent we are on God is that we look so solid. I mean the body feels kind of solid, squashy -- depending on how much you eat -- but pretty solid. It is true that the scientists are helping us a little to realize that that [indicating a hand] really isn't so solid. Or that this [indicating a chair] isn't so solid. And that $E=mc^2$ suggests that this really is not solid at all but it is made up of all kinds of little electrical charges; protons and neutrons and even smaller particles than that that are orbiting around each other at tremendous speed. Do you remember that the suggestion is that even if you vary the speed of that you can actually make this go through walls and do all kinds of things that Jesus resurrection body did?

But certainly we are all beginning to get hold of the idea that this isn't as solid as we thought it was. And so it is becoming increasingly believable for people like ourselves in the 20th Century to realize that we are very dependent on whatever power holds all these protons and neutrons together and keeps them spinning the way they do. Indeed we do begin to realize with a thing like cancer, that something can go wrong in the system and those protons and neutrons start spinning the wrong way or start multiplying the cells. So we can see it is possible that some little thing can go wrong with that complex system and the whole thing begins to spin in the wrong way. So it is more and more credible to us when we are told that it is God that keeps you and me together. It is God that holds you together; that if God withdrew his little finger you would explode into a million pieces. That if God withdrew his little finger you would disappear or you would become one of those black holes of immense density of matter that would be absolutely incapable of any kind of personal response.

So I think it is more and more credible to people like ourselves who know some of these things that, in fact, we are utterly dependent on our Father. And loved ones whether we know it or not, whether we believe it or not, we are utterly dependent on this being that holds everything together. The more we hear from the doctors the more we realize we don't know. They talk about the beat of the heart being basic and yet nothing can explain why that wave starts in a certain part of the heart. They don't really know why it starts. They can describe it with all kinds of electrical impulses, but they can't tell where that electrical impulse comes from. And the more we get into what we do know of medicine the more we realize we are all utterly dependant on whatever that power is that keeps our heart beating, and that, really, if God decided this moment; you would go out like a light, you would just go out like that. And that every night that passes the miracle is that you and I awake in the morning. That's the miracle -- that someone has kept this process going through the night. It becomes more and more miraculous the more we see the trouble we have to go to in order to keep these things going -- how much trouble it takes us to imbed pacemakers in someone's chest -- so that the heart can receive that impulse that keeps it going.

The more we realize the kind of machinery that is required to keep kidney's functioning, and the more we realize how impossible it is for us to keep more than maybe 10 or 20 people in a city going on dialysis, the more we realize that we are very dependent on a great Creator that keeps the processes of our bodies and our minds going continually. So loved one's we are very dependant on him, that's just reality. That's simple reality. We aren't even talking yet about the amazing powers that enable us, with these little cameras that we have, to see the things all around us -- to focus

on them so fast and to have little images of those things come into the backs of our eyes and into our brains and then it's able to interpret and translate those into some kind of meaningful language that we can use to direct our hands, our feet and our ears to respond to it. We're not talking about all that miraculous connection that ties up our senses; our hearing and seeing and feeling and touching and tasting with this external world. And then we're not even touching the whole amazing world of perception that is beyond ourselves whereby you or I walk into a room where there is somebody else and without even being able to see them or hear them, we sense a whole attitude that is coming from them to us; a whole psychological attitude that is different from the attitude that somebody else is sending to us; that whole world of vibrations and all the psychological feelings and psychological life.

All of that is maintained by our Father upon whom we are, actually, utterly dependent. Love one's faith is simply recognizing that and living in that reality; that's what faith is. Faith is just realizing all of that and resting back and saying, "Thank you Father, thank you. Thank you Lord that everything that I have and everything that I am comes from you moment by moment. Thank you Lord." And in the moment anything goes wrong with this system say, "Father I know there is only one who can fix this; Lord I thank you that you are already working on it. I thank you Father that I don't need to have an extra beat of my heart, not an extra moment of worry, Father, thank you." So as the eyesight goes, or the hearing goes, or the sickness comes up in the body or the little cold or flu is felt, or the terrible cancer is diagnosed; there is a resting back and saying, "Father thank you Lord that you have noticed all the other things in me as I have gone through this life, and you've certainly known this dreadfully wrong thing that has taken place, and Father you have provided for everything else in the world and I know you've provided for this." That's what faith is. Faith is just relaxing day by day continually in that certainty. That of course is what brings peace to our hearts and that's what also opens to us the whole continuing world of life that God is anxious to pour upon us. That's why that whole world of life that rectifies things moment by moment as we go along can only come in upon us as we exercise that faith which is very rational and reasonable.

Now loved ones you can sense that then the Father is here carrying all of us; he's carrying us, that's what he's doing. He's carrying your heart and my heart. He's carrying your blood circulation. He's carrying the operation of your brain. He's carrying the car that carry's you through the day. He's holding all the matter and the protons and the neutrons together that form the engine block. He's holding it all together, so he has it all in his hands. What pleases him and delights him is when you just recognize that is reality, and you acknowledge and there's a great peace between him and you. He feels, "Yeah these are my dear children; I'm carrying them and they know it. Oh how good it is, how good it feels; they know that I'm here and I know that they're here and we're together, and this is what family is about." The Father gets great pleasure and great peace from that, and that opens the way for the transfer of his life to you and me, and of your love to him; so you breathe in his life and you breathe out your love and your faith to him.

Now think of the situation if he's carrying all of us -- even two of us or three of us, let alone a dozen of us or twenty of us or three billion of us, and we're all saying, "Well what are we going to do here; we have this life, we have these hearts, we have this earth here. Now what are we going to do with it? Well I know what I would like to do; I'd like to do this, and this, and this. And I wish it would work better; I'm sorry we have such a poor operation here but let's get to work and let's do something about it. I don't know what on earth is behind this whole thing, but I'm glad we have control of it now; let's get in and use it for our own purposes." Loved one's, it's a barrier, a wall of concrete, between us and our dear Father. Its darts and swords and bullets and pains and agonies of all kind that come into his heart that shatter that mystic love-sensitive relationship of

the Father with his children. That's what unbelief is, and that's what lack of faith is.

So when the Father sees you worrying, or he sees you anxious because the money isn't working out or the job isn't working out or because you're sick or because there's something wrong in your home or there's something wrong in the relationship and he sees you worrying and anxious about it, it has the same effect on him as those people who are saying "Well I'm glad we have this thing in our own control." It's exactly the same [attitude] as the Hitler's. It's exactly the same as the murderers; it brings pain to him. That lack of faith is the deepest sin in his eyes, because it breaks utterly the continuing flow of life between him and you.

Now that's what faith is, you see. And what we're talking about these Sunday evenings is the joy and the delight of living in that faith moment by moment every day and that's the faith that was established in what was known as the covenant of faith, between God and Abraham. God said to Abraham, "Now you're 75" that's what he was first, then, "You're 86", then, "Now you're 99 and even though the world says you cannot have a son, and you're wife is only 10 years younger than you and she can't bear a child, I'm going to give you a son." And Abraham did a very reasonable thing, for a man like the rest of us here who knew that God holds everything in his hands, he believed God. God regarded that as right and he was pleased with Abraham, and that's what he is with you and me. There isn't really need for a whole lot of contortions; there isn't need for a whole lot of "What can I do to please God, or what should I do right to make him like me?" There isn't need for all of that; there's just need for trusting him. You've just to believe God. You've just to begin to look up to him and say, "Father I believe you and I trust you. And as my life passes, I trust you every step of the way for each situation that pleases God."

That's the faith that justifies; that's the faith that makes you righteous in his eyes. That's the faith that makes you right with him. Why? Because that's reality; you are utterly dependent upon him. You are -- every moment you are. So you just recognizing that and living in that peace makes you right with him. It opens the gates to heaven, sets up a "Jacobs Ladder" between you and heaven, and you begin to have commerce with the powers of God in heaven. That's what we're talking about these Sunday evenings. That's all that faith is. It's nothing mysterious. It's nothing very religious. It's just living in that peace day by day, and you can know that, of course. The Holy Spirit will witness to you when you're not living in that faith. The Holy Spirit witnesses to you -- especially to you in worry -- do you see that; especially in worry. We have gone so far astray from God that we think worry is a little thing. We're so stupid aren't we? We're so silly, we say, "Sex -- that's a big sin, but worry, well that's just a little psychological weakness." Well I'm not playing down the immorality that's involved in sexual license, but really that's not the worst sin at all; the worst sin is lack of faith, its lack of trust in God, worrying, being anxious; that hurts God just as much and it seems almost more, than simply doing wrong things -- though you do wrong things because you don't trust him. Those of us involved in sexual license are involved in it because we don't trust him to give us what we need in our emotional and physical lives so we are going after it ourselves. That hurts him too. But they both, the worry and sexual license, have the same common denominator; they lack trust in the Father. They lack deep peace and faith in him. So loved one's that's why faith is so vital and that's why God established that covenant of faith with Abraham and said, "You're going to be the father of all those that believe me, because that's the way I want my people to live."

That's what God did: he established a covenant of faith with Abraham and we read about that in Genesis 15. Then in Genesis 17 God gave to Abraham a sign that that had been established. He gave him that sign in Genesis 17:9, "And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant"

the covenant of faith that I have made with you, “you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep,” this is the sign of the covenant “between me and you and your descendants after you; every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.” Now even that was only a sign of what God had already done in Jesus, and that is described in Colossians 2:11. “In him also” that is, in Jesus, “you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands.” So even that circumcision, back in Abraham’s time, was only a sign of a spiritual circumcision that had already taken place in the “lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.” “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.”

God has already done all that -- that’s what that says. God circumcised you with a circumcision not made with hands; he circumcised that body of flesh of yours. What is the body of flesh? The little independent, worrying, anxious body; the mind; the emotions that are constantly working as if there is no God and there is no dear Father. That body of flesh was circumcised -- was cut away from you in Jesus -- and was buried with him by baptism into death. That all has been done, it has been done; you can believe that this moment and you can be free of it. So some of us say, “I’m trying to put away this body of flesh, I am. This body of flesh that gets angry and impatient and gets irritable and gets lustful, I’m trying to put it away. I’m doing everything possible to put it away.” Well that’s pretty dumb-- it’s already been put away. What are you working yourself to death about? That’s what the Father feels, you see. He says, “But wait my child, that’s what I did in my son. You can never put away that body of flesh -- it’s too much part of you. You know that -- you’ve tried to put away the lust, you’ve tried to put away the pride, you’ve tried to put away the envy, and you’ve tried to stop worrying. You know you’ve tried to do that but it’s so much part of you. Do you see only me, with my knife, could cut around that. Only I could do it, and I did it; I circumcised that body of flesh in my son Jesus. I put you into him and I cut that all away and you are free of that; its Satan that is trying to persuade you that that body of flesh is still all around you and you believe him. No --believe me.” And you’re saying, “Oh but when I see the signs of it!” “Still believe in me” he says, “Believe me, believe it to death. Don’t try to suffocate it to death or beat it to death or train it to death or church go it to death, believe it to death. Believe me I’ve already done this.” That’s the situation we are all in, actually. We are all in that position where we have all been circumcised in Jesus and all God is asking us is to have faith that that is so. We can do that this very night loved ones. You can have faith that that is done.

I don’t know how many of you are anxious to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and how many of you are so anxious to be clear of that old [Dr.] Hyde that is inside you that makes the Dr. Jekyll seem such a hypocrite. Well it has already been done. You have already been circumcised in Jesus and God is saying, “Believe this.” And if you say to me, “I do believe it, but it does seem that I still have some of these things in my life.” That’s God showing you some of the things that you’re not yet ready to let go of and he’s saying, “Let go of it. Let go of it my child. Let me show you what it will be like if you’re clear of it. Let go of it and believe me that I have already done away with it and that I have a more beautiful thing for you in its place.” God is urging us to step into that. So loved one’s that’s what faith is; faith is believing that.

Now that's what Abraham actually was beginning to enter into. So what we see in Chapter 18 tonight is where he has really begun to become a friend of God. That's what he was called you remember. It's a great privilege to be called the friend of God, and that's what Jesus called us; he said "I've called you, not servants, but I've called you friends, because a servant doesn't know what his Lord is doing. I've called you friends because you're a part of me." And this was how Abraham behaved; as the friend of God, in Genesis 18:1, "And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day." The thing a lot of us tend to say is, "God actually appeared to him? Well you know that is a lot easier to believe in than what we have: we don't have Jesus visible before our eyes and that's what makes my prayer time a lot harder." But actually the Lord couldn't appear to him because of what we read in John 1:18, "No one has ever seen God." So actually God couldn't appear to him because the Bible says no one has ever seen God but you see the next part of the verse, "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." Jesus is the one that expresses God to us. You remember back in verse 2 it says, "He was in the beginning with God." So when it says in Genesis 18 "The Lord appeared by the oaks of Mamre," it's not God, but it's Jesus "as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day." Some of us will say, "At least it was Jesus, but at least he saw him with his physical eyes." Well of course that would be sight and not faith if that's what happened, but that's not what happened as you see in verse 2. "He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him." That's all he saw-- three men. We're told in the Bible, because God is giving us the view from heaven, we're being told, "Now the Lord appeared to Abraham" but then we go down to earth and see Abraham looking up, and all he sees is three men. So Abraham was actually in the same situation as you and I are; all he saw was three men. He didn't see Jesus in front of his eyes recognizable as Jesus.

In other words he was in the same position as those two men, you remember, on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13. It's one of those post-resurrection experiences that took place, "That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them." Verse 16, "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him." So whatever resurrection appearance he had, they weren't able to recognize him as Jesus, and Abraham was in the same position; he saw three men, one of whom was Jesus and two who were angels of God. So he was in the same position -- he just saw three men; he was in the same position as these men on the road to Emmaus.

Then you see in Luke 24:31 what happened to them, "And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight." So, suddenly something happened so that they saw; they were able to recognize that this man whom they couldn't recognize physically as Jesus was in fact, Jesus. In other words the eyes of their faith were opened and they saw him. Now when did that happen? Back in Luke 24:27, "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. [Romans 10:17].

The way to know the presence of God in our own quiet times is to spend time in this dear word, to allow the words of this book to become the real world for us. As you do that, as you soak yourself, loved ones, in this dear book, this world becomes more real than this passing facade that is around about us. Your faith begins to grow as you spend time in this book and spend time, not just reading it, we have a lot of Bible study courses that are good, but so many of them are just reading it as if it's a book or studying it as if it's a book or studying it to get answers on some doctrine. Well no; soak yourself in it as the love letters of your Father to you. Search it to know

his heart, to understand the way he thinks. Einstein said "Why do I do my studies and my theory's and form my hypothesis? Because I want to know how God thinks. I want to know how he thought when he put this world together." Now that's why you study this book; to find out how God thinks. As you spend time doing that you begin to understand and see how he thinks and your faith rises, then God begins to be real to you in your quiet times. So many of us have real trouble because we live not just in this world, we have to live in this world; most of us are either business people, or we work in some way; we're arguing about payables and receivables or we're arguing with somebody else. We're in the midst of this world -- most of us are -- in the middle of that rough tumble market place. But loved ones you don't need to live there in your heart. Your mind can be occupied with those things, your emotions even, but in your heart you can live in the world of this book. And so in your heart you can live in a world of faith and it's in that world of faith that you begin to recognize the presence of God when he comes into your consciousness. That's how Abraham did it, you see.

Genesis Chapter 18:1, "And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him." Then this is what we need to do when we have faith: "When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to earth and said, 'My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant'" he acted in faith, "'Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on -- since you have come to your servant.'" Could he have said, "I think one of them looks different, but it's nothing, they're just three men -- hi guys." He could have said that; but he acted on what he believed in his faith was true. He acted in accordance with that. See, there are times in prayer, a time in quietness, when you sense God has said something to you and you need to act on that. But too often we say, "It was probably my own thoughts. It's probably just the turning of my own mind. It's just my memory of something I read." And so we have entertained an angel, but we pass by so quickly, and we missed the moment.

Faith is action; it's acting in accordance with that. There's no real miracle in that, you know, but there's an appropriateness to it, isn't there. The act itself won't do anything, but when you meet somebody like the King of Kings, it's very natural to bow down; it's very natural to kneel. So not only is that the important thing in prayer, but particularly when a moment of quietness comes and you sense God is saying, "I'm here my child, I'm real, drop everything and get to work." Act in accordance with that. I don't know how much of this "in and out" you do in prayer time: "Well Lord -- just got a few minutes here, just want to bring you up to date. Then you bring him up to date and, "Okay Lord have to go." I think it's just bluff and the Father knows it. Father knows you wouldn't treat the Queen of England this way, let alone the King of the Universe. So there is a way in which faith expresses itself in action, loved ones; the way Abraham treated this person whom he believed to be Jesus himself, and so with us.

I don't know how you do it in your bedroom, but God was good to me when I was a teenager; he showed me it was much more reasonable to think Jesus was in my very bedroom and it was very reasonable to stand in his presence and to speak to him, or it was very reasonable to bow at certain times on my knees to him. But it was very reasonable to treat him as a real person in my bedroom. There is an appropriateness of action that expresses faith and there is an inappropriateness of action that actually kills faith and murders it. So this is what we see here with the friend of God in verse 4; " 'Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on -- since you have come to your servant.'" And there is some recognition of the gratitude to God for giving him this moment of revelation.

I don't know if you remember what Thomas a Kempis said. He said "Sometimes God grants us the grace of devotion" and that's beautiful isn't it? "Sometimes God grants us the grace of devotion." So often we react against that and we say, "He better; he ought to be glad that we are ready to devote ourselves to him, that ought to be something that we feel all the time." But the men who have come close to God realize that it's God's graciousness that gives us the grace of devotion at times. Now when the grace of devotion comes to you say that to God: "Lord thank you for coming by my house. Thank you for coming. Thank you for giving me this grace of devotion. Lord I leave everything aside and I express this to you." So when you sense that God has come by your house, then give time to him and act in accordance with your faith.

I think many times we have lost the presence of God and lost a great deal of word from him because we have not acted in accordance with our faith. I don't know how you think about it, but I think we, in our expedient way say "What does it matter? I mean I can get that back any time." Well you can't get it back anytime. When the Lord comes upon the scene you need to respect him and recognize him. You may say "Now wait a minute Pastor, you know that God is omnipotent, God is omniscient, God is everywhere." Now we know that God is everywhere all the time, but loved ones, we still are in a time space world, and God is still gracious in that he comes to us at certain times in a more real way than at others, at least it seems more real because we can perceive it. At those times he expects us to recognize it and respect what he's done. He knows the difference; we don't know. Maybe in heaven we learn, I don't know how it works, but probably in heaven we learn how God is able to, even though he is here in all our hearts at this moment, and yet at certain times he is able to make himself more known to us. But certainly we can see that's a favor from him, and that's something he wants us to recognize and have faith in, not take a kind of pragmatic attitude to it. "Oh well, I must have had a better dinner tonight or my perception is a little better tonight, or it must be that song we sang at church; I can sense Jesus' presence a little more." No, this is a holy moment when the Savior comes upon the scene. Recognize him. Respect him. Leave aside everything and pay attention to him.

I don't know how you do with interruptions when somebody knocks on the door or somebody calls, or your T.V. program is on, but if there was a knock on the door and it was the President you would not dream of saying "Excuse me Mr. President; I'm busy with something else right now." You would realize that you have an important guest and you would pay attention to him. Now that seems to come into this. Obviously Abraham had the attitude "Let bread be brought. Let me get the best things, kill a nice lamb from the herd, and let me get everything, because my Lord has come to visit me today." There is something beautiful about that isn't there? So if we would treat our Lord like that, those moments in your prayer time would become precious.

Gerard Manley Hopkins has a poem that says "And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil; And bears man's smudge and share's man's smell:" It seems that we have so often smeared all the beauty with our own rush and bustle and our desire to get on to the next thing. Faith requires action that is appropriate to it, and God notices that. Now you say, "Wait a minute Pastor; God is bright enough that he isn't put off by our actions." God knows that faith is action -- it's not just a mental experience or an emotional experience.

So loved one's if you look at verse 5, "while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves" because he wanted Jesus to enjoy himself and of course that's good, because when you begin to be anxious that, "Lord Jesus I want you to know the things that I've done today and Lord I want you to enjoy this" it's great when you begin to be anxious for Jesus to refresh himself. Have

you ever thought that the Lord Jesus is refreshed when a member of his body communes with him? That's refreshing for Jesus and that gives him delight and pleasure. Verse 5 again, "and after that you may pass on -- since you have come to your servant. So they said, 'Do as you have said.' And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.' And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate." So he did everything that was appropriate to his faith that this was his Lord, the Savior of his life, the Lamb who was symbolized by the lamb he had killed; the lamb that had died for him and that had included him in his death.

Then verse 9, "They said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?'" That's the purpose that Jesus came by; Jesus came by to build up Sarah's faith. You remember this was because the promise that God had given to Abraham had required Abraham's wife very much in it. You remember in Genesis 15:5, "And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you're able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" Then in Genesis 17 Abraham was told by God that God would in fact give him a son and would give him it through Sarah in Genesis 17:19, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac." So Sarah was going to bear the son, and in order to bear the son she had to have faith herself. That's the way God works; you have to have faith for the thing. God had already done it in Sarah -- he had already included Sarah's old body in Jesus and he had destroyed that old body and resurrected it and made it new and able to bear children. But it could only bear a child when Sarah herself had faith for that. Now that's the way Jesus works; it is unto you according to your faith.

So all of these things have already happened in your life, but unless you have faith for them God cannot do them. Jesus said that in Mark 11:22, you have to have faith; "And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast to the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him'" because it's already been done in me, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." But you have to have faith for it because God is bringing, out of eternity, the things that he has done there, and he is bringing them into time. You don't need H.G. Wells' "Time Machine" to do that; you need faith. Faith is what breaks the barrier of time and eternity and enables God to bring the things into your life.

The reason Sarah was able to have this child even though she was 89 years of age was because of her faith. Hebrews 11:11 "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised." So Sarah received power to conceive by faith. Now God had to bring her to that place because she wasn't at that place at all and this is why Jesus came; to build up Sarah's faith. Verse 9, "They said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' And he said, 'She is in the tent.' The Lord said, 'I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son.' But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; because she was afraid. He said, 'No, but you did laugh.'" In other words, "I heard you but I will still keep my promise."

You can see why Abraham is called the friend of God; because God was so nice to him, so dear, so familiar, and so intimate, as he is with us. He is trying to work that faith in you. He is trying to build up your faith; and that's why he works with you -- yes he does. He's kind, and gracious, and patient. And he does know this; that he's limited by your faith; only if your faith is exercised can he do anything through you in this world; only if you believe him to do it. You have situations coming up this week in your life that are not good -- difficult situations that need to be changed. God has already changed them in Jesus, but he can't bring that change into time unless you believe that it has been already done. And he is with you as he is with Sarah; he knows what went on behind the tent door, and he knows whether there's a chuckle or worry or anxiety in your heart. He knows if there's real faith and peaceful confidence, or if you're just hoping for the best. And where he sees faith, he is able to bring the miracle that he has wrought in eternity in Jesus into time, and make it manifest. So that might help you in dealing with other people; what you need to do is build up their faith, but it might help also in regard to your own situation.

God is always trying to build up your faith. He's trying to take away your faith in yourself and your faith in the world, and he's trying to build up your faith in his ability to do things. And of course he usually has to deal with us as he did with Abraham and Sarah; he had to wait until they were about 99 -- until there was no hope; there was no life in them that could bring about anything. You can see how far he has to go; there's still hope that at 75 we might have a baby! Well maybe at 86 we might have a baby -- it's only when we get to 99 we think, "No way will we have a baby." It's the same with this: God is gracious to us and often has to do hard things; often has to bring obvious death into the situation in every other way. He often has to strip us of any hope of doing anything about the situation ourselves, and only then, out of that fire and ashes, rises something beautiful, some hope in God, some real confidence that he has done something about it.

Loved ones, that's it; our Father, mighty though he is, cannot bring the miracles that he has wrought for you into your life unless you have absolute confidence that he has already done these things. The moment that you have absolute confidence that he has already done these things, the moment you believe that the lamb has been slain from before the foundation of the world, and with that lamb all the obstacles in your life -- you, yourself, as well -- the moment you begin to live in that peaceful faith -- that moment God begins to manifest it in your life and you begin to walk that charmed way.

So I would say begin; stop this admixture of life. Stop this partial faith in yourself and partial faith in God; partial faith in the luck of the circumstances and in other people and partial faith in God, when the circumstances don't work out right. Stop that mixture -- let all of that die, and put away all of your hope and trust in the world, and in yourself and in others. See that God has walked this life before you and has planned it all and has a charmed way for you to walk that he has made ready. It's all ready loved ones; all you have to do is walk down this road, and the Father is asking you to do it. He sees you climbing over all these fences and he says, "Wait a minute; come back here and walk here; I've cleared this way for you." And you say, "I have to clear all the fences myself you know. I have to do it -- that's what life's about." And the Father is saying, "Come on, I have a way for you here that I cleared in my son Jesus." And we keep on; reluctant to believe. "Not to him that worketh not; but to him that believeth in him that justified the ungodly, his faith has turned it for righteousness." We keep on being reluctant to believe that and we keep on wanting to work and work and bring it about, while God is always trying to get us back, "There's work to be done here on this road, plenty of work. But it's different work; it's not work involved in trying to overcome the effects of the fallen world that God has already destroyed." So I pray that you'll have a good week, and that you'll actually change your actions to express your faith.

Let us pray.

Dear Father: We thank you for such a path. We thank you there is such a way to walk. Thank you Lord that there is a way free from fret and anxiety; a way that is free from worry, a way that is free from sharp, abrupt reactions against people that try to control them and a way that is free from criticism to try to put people right. A way that is free from manipulating circumstances. A way that is free from that arrogance that we so often feel we're driven into to get things done. Lord there is a way of gladness. There is a highway of holiness; a way that you have prepared for us to walk upon that the wayfaring man will not miss; the wayfaring man who believes in the lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world, and who believes that you have made the darkness already light before him and you have made the crooked things straight. Father thank you that that's the way you have for us to walk this week.

Lord, we look forward especially to the times when we are sitting under the oaks at Mamre, and the Lord comes by. Lord, we will make room for you; we will put away the unimportant issues and the unimportant things and we will make ourselves available to the King of Kings, to receive and hear what you have to tell us. So Father we thank you for this charmed life that you have for us in Jesus. We give ourselves to you now, for a good week of liberty, where you will manifest in time all the victories that you have already won for us in eternity. Thank you Lord.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.