

**Sermon File # 520**

**Scripture Text: Genesis 15:1-6; Additional Reading: Romans 4:18-25**

**Sermon Title: *Saving Faith***

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**At International Baptist Church, Brussels, Belgium**

**On Sunday morning, 22 July 2012.**

**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.**

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## ***Saving Faith***

### **Introduction:**

Today we continue to look at the life of Abram (later to be named Abraham) as an example of one who lived by faith. Last Sunday we looked at Abram's faltering in faith, as he left the land of promise and went down into Egypt, apart from the leading and will of God, in order to avoid famine rather than trusting God during the famine. In chapter 13, we read about Abram and his nephew, Lot, separating, due to overcrowding from their flocks and herds. Lot apparently made his choice based solely on personal greed. In chapter 14 we see that Lot's choice of living in the wicked city of Sodom led to his being abducted by four kings. Abram then, with 318 trained men from his household, rescued Lot by defeating these invading kings.

After this victorious episode, Abram seems to fall into a state of doubt and perhaps depression, much like that of Elijah, following his victory on Mt Carmel (1Kings 19:3f, Wiersbe, 44f). Abram begins to struggle with the temptation to doubt the promise of God given when he was called to the land of promise (Genesis 12:2-3). He is in need for a fresh word from the Lord, which God gives him in this significant passage of Scripture.

Follow as I read **Genesis 15:1-6**. I will also read Paul's commentary on Abram's faith in **Romans 4:18-25**.

Compared with the other events in Abram's life, this dialogue in our text seems relatively insignificant. Yet, as is noted by one Old Testament scholar, "No event of Abraham's life surpasses this in importance" (Baldwin, 50). Abram had already given evidence of profound faith through his willingness to trust and obey the Lord in making his 500-mile pilgrimage to the land of promise, believing that God would use him to be the father of a great nation, the people of God (Genesis 12:1ff). As we noted last Sunday, his faith had faltered, but did not finally fail, and Abram went back to Bethel to renew his commitment to the Lord (13:3-4). We see evidence of his faith in the ways he relates to his nephew Lot, submitting to his choice of the best of the land, and in the way he bravely rescued Lot from his captors. Abram even became the first tither, as he gave to the priest Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils won in battle (14:20).

The importance of our text for today is the way it zeros in on the faith of Abram, whenever it may have begun, as a saving faith, the kind of faith that brought Abram into a relationship with God and bound him to that relationship. Verse 6 of our text is quoted in the New Testament by the apostles Paul and James as a summary of saving faith, the kind of faith in God that brings us into a relationship with God and that demonstrates its authenticity by obedience. This statement about Abram's saving faith became not only Paul's basis for his argument for salvation by grace alone through faith alone (In Galatians 3 and Romans 4); it also became the impetus for the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther's own conversion came through his understanding of this text as exegeted by Paul in Romans (Boice, 98).

In a church like IBC, comprised of members and congregants from so many different denominational backgrounds, it is vitally important that we clearly understand the core teaching of God's word about this most important matter: What is the basis of our salvation, of our being made right with God? How can each one of us have assurance of eternal life, even though we represent various rights of passage into church membership, and practice different ordinances to symbolize our faith relationship with Christ? We here at IBC need to share the common understanding and also the experience of saving faith, regardless of when or how we were baptized and regardless of our church creeds on other nonessential matters.

As we look at the saving faith of Abram, the first thing that is quite obvious is that it...

### **Begins with God's revelation**

This entire episode in our text is about the word of the Lord coming to Abram. Note, that although this was called a vision, it was a vision of the *word* of God. Patriarchs and prophets of old were privileged to receive special visions, or appearances of the Lord. But we are all privileged in a way they were not—to have access to God's completed Scriptural revelation, the written word of God.

In verses 1-5, the word came to Abram and it was...

### *By his initiative*

One of the inexplicable aspects of God's call of Abram is that he had done nothing to set him apart as a candidate for this designation by God. And one of the hard truths of Scripture is his sovereign choice of his people (Carson, *DD*, 45ff). As Moses reminded the Israelites, "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 7:7f). And there was nothing about Abram, who was called out of paganism, in a far country, at an advanced age, to commend him to God. And Sarai, by whom the promised child was to be born, was significantly beyond the age for bearing children.

And so we agree with the apostle Paul that there is nothing to commend us as God's chosen instruments, as the weak people whom God will use to show his surpassing greatness (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). God took the initiative, in fact, marking us out for his own, "before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

Whether God came to you as a child, as was true for me when I first trusted Jesus as my Savior, or spoke his word to you in your adulthood, in any case it was by his initiative. Apart from his initiative, we would be both unwilling and unable to seek the saving grace of God. Paul says we were dead in our transgressions and sins and were objects of God's wrath. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5). God made the first move toward us because we were helpless, as was Abram.

And God gave to Abram his revelation...

### *About his nature*

Any appearing of the Lord would be frightening to a mere mortal, and so the Lord gives the gracious, "Do not be afraid" (verse 1). God's nature is holy, totally separate from sin and sinners. But he is also loving and gracious.

The Lord spoke to Abram about his nature as his shield and also as his reward (verse 1). "The Hebrew word for 'shield' (*magen*) is from the same root as Melchizedek's word *defeated* (14:20). The Lord who had defeated Abram's enemies would continue to protect him" (Schmutzer & Ross, 50). God wants us to know about his love, faithfulness and goodness.

Our text for today, particularly verse 6, has been called the "John 3:16 of the Old Testament." John 3:16 speaks about the amazing grace of God, who loved the world so much that he gave his one-of-a-kind Son to die for us. When God stirs in us saving faith, he speaks to us as the God of holiness and of perfect love and grace—his desperately needed but undeserved action on our behalf. He in compassion comes to us to awaken in us saving faith.

But then there must be, as was true for Abram, and awareness...

### *About our need*

Abram was confronted with his weakness and desperate need for God to act in his behalf; else he was a pitiable sojourner, marooned far away from home, the victim of an empty dream. As was noted, here we have a picture of Abram, having just accomplished an amazing victory over the alliance of local kings, giving a “pitiful response” to God’s reminder of his promise (Wenham, 334).

Saving faith is possible only for hearts made humble before holy God. Perhaps this is an aspect of the childlikeness Jesus said is requisite for entrance into the kingdom of God. A child is totally dependent on others and is always in a position of weakness and helplessness (Mark 10:13-16). And it is always from a position of helplessness that anyone approaches God for his saving mercy and grace. We are helpless and also sinful.

Decades ago, the gospel was often presented with clichés, such as “Smile. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Nothing was about sin and the need for repentance. And the reaction to this cloying presentation was often, “Why shouldn’t God love me? After all, I’m a pretty good person.” But God saves only those who realize a desperate need for what he can do to repair a broken life and a broken relationship with God.

Brain Dodd speaks to this sense of helplessness and need when he writes about how God chooses Christian leaders who realize our weakness and rely on him for grace and strength:

“Recently (former) Governor Jesse Ventura of Minnesota (USA) and media mogul Ted Turner came out with their version of Karl Marx’s ‘Christianity is an opiate for the masses.’ One, a former Navy Seal and professional wrestler turned politician, and the other an independent and wealthy entrepreneur, jabbed, ‘Jesus is a crutch for the weak.’ Said Ventura, ‘Organized religion is a sham and crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers.’ What are we tempted to answer in reply? If our tendency is to deny this, then we are tempted to sell out the real gospel. We should not be embarrassed by such criticisms. Instead, if we are honest with ourselves and biblical in our theology, we should proudly claim, ‘Jesus is much more than a crutch. He is a whole hospital! Where would I be without Jesus?’ Effective outreach to unchurched people today is emergency room ministry. If they allow us unto their world to help them, we find them bruised, battered and broken. Jesus cries out now as back then, ‘How I would gather you under my wings like a mother hen her chicks.’ How Jesus would have compassion on them because they are needy sheep without a shepherd!” (Dodd, 88).

And so, God came to Abram, who was perhaps emotionally bruised and feeling a bit battered by disappointment, which he candidly expressed to God (verses 2-4). Abram was ready to settle for second best in his life, assuming that it was impossible to expect a miracle in his and Sarai’s life. And so, he decided that his adopted servant would become his heir and the progenitor of God’s new people. God doesn’t chide Abram for his doubts and weakness of faith, but rather answers him with a new revelation...

### *About his provision*

When God stirs us to saving faith he meets us right where we are. He allows us to express fears, doubts and reluctance to believe, just as we see in the laments in the Psalms. God assures Abram that he is his shield, reward and also that he will work a miracle in giving him a direct heir from his seed and Sarai's body, and that as a result his offspring shall be as uncountable as the stars (1, 4f).

In the same way, when God stirs saving faith, he promises the free gift of eternal life. In our evangelism, we have erroneously focused almost exclusively on the promise of life in heaven after we die. Yet God's salvation is the provision of eternal life, the life of God that begins immediately. It's the gift of new life in Christ, the life of God in us now, that makes us his new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As one writer has said, the promises of God to Abram are the Old Testament equivalent to the New Testament promises in Matthew 6:33 and Philippians 4:19 (Wiersbe, 45f). The revelation of God that comes to us to stir us to saving faith includes his promise to meet every need of ours, in this life as well as the next. God's salvation is a comprehensive term, covering all of life, our physical and material needs as well as our new and everlasting relationship with God.

The Lord said to Abram, "I am your shield, your very great reward" (1). Eternal life is in essence the life of God lived in us, and God himself is to be the object of our pursuits and the joy and delight of life. God himself, his presence with us and within us, becomes the true reward of faith, and not "all of these other things" (Matthew 6:33). Spiritual growth leads us to the place where we are willing to relinquish "all of these other things" in order that we might gain the fullness of Christ. In fact, for the rich young man to find saving faith, it was essential for him that first of all he relinquish his hold on his material wealth, which he was unwilling to do (Mark 10:17ff).

As we see in our text, now in verse 6, saving faith...

### **Involves our response**

"Abram believed the Lord..." (6). He responded to God's revelation, to the word of God. The Apostle Peter writes about "those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ *have received* a faith as precious as ours" (2 Peter 1:1). Even our faith response is enabled by God. As Paul writes, "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8f). The entire process, grace and faith, is enabled by God. But we respond to God's enabling grace, enabling us to respond in faith. This, as was true for Abram, is a response...

### *Of openness*

When I reflect on the necessity of openness to God's truth as a component of saving faith, I think again about what Jesus said about the quality of childlikeness being

essential for entrance into the kingdom of God (Mark 10:13-16). Jesus encountered the stiff resistance and harsh opposition of the leaders of Israel's religion, due to their strong and proud prejudices that blinded them to the truth of his being the incarnate Son of God. And of course, each generation has its prejudices against the truth of God's word and the revelation of God through his word, which challenges the mindset and disposition of the fallen world. Note the tendentious theories propounding extra-canonical gospels and fabricated theories more in line with New Age philosophy (Witherington, 15ff). In contrast to this blind hardness was the childlike openness of the first disciples and others who followed Jesus. As a child is not predisposed to layers of formed opinions but is open to new truth, so we must come to God with an open, teachable spirit.

Abram was made open to God's revelation and was enabled to see with the eyes of faith. He was open to God's truth, and in some mysterious sense, this was about the truth of God the Savior. Jesus himself referred to this truth when he spoke to his religious opponents about how that "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Jesus identified himself as "the ultimate fulfillment of all Abraham's hopes and joys" (Carson, 357). Abram believed that God indeed would greatly reward him, and that the reward would be given through his son. As church father, Ambrose, wrote: Abram "believed prefiguratively" in the divine heir (32). Just as we believe in Christ who has come to us in Jesus of Nazareth, so Abram was given to believe that Christ the Savior, the Redeemer, would come. Abram's saving faith was "anticipation of Christ's life, death and resurrection...under the tuition of Jesus himself, we learn that Abram had eternal life" (Baldwin, 56).

The Christian gospel, the good news, is about God's Son, Jesus Christ, who came in the flesh, lived a sinless death and was crucified on the cross for our sins. He wasn't a hapless victim, but his mission was to come into the world to save sinners, knowing that his mission was to be fulfilled on the cross, not as a victim, but as a deliberate sacrifice for us (Mark 10:45; John 12:27). And his sacrificial death was the provision of God for the forgiveness and eternal life for all who would believe in him. The power of God that raised Jesus from the grave on Easter morning is the same power that raises to new life all who turn from sin and believe in him (Ephesians 1:19-20). The good news of Christ presupposes the bad news of our lostness and our separation from holy God. Like Abram, we are in need of God's mercy and grace and promises. And so in openness we turn to the truth in God's word about Christ, his death and his resurrection. Then there comes the response...

### *Of believing and trusting*

"Abram believed the Lord..." Literally, he "amened" the Lord, and "Placed his entire weight upon" the truth of God's promise to him, which is the literal translation of this Hebrew word "to believe" (Kline, 95). Saving faith is more than intellectual assent to a propositional truth. Faith is the response of acceptance, trust and reliance.

Years ago I heard of the work of a Wycliffe Bible translator in a remote area of the world, working with a people who had never had any Scriptures written in their language. The translator was unable to find a word for faith, until a local man came into the missionary's small office, and being exhausted, fell into a chair, saying how

good it was to place his entire weight on the chair. The missionary-translator then heard the word he was looking for to translate “faith”—“to place one’s weight upon.”

#### Against the odds

Saving faith believes and trusts even against all outward appearances, which is the way Paul describes the faith of Abraham in Romans 4:21, “being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he promised.” The Christian faith is not irrational. In fact, it is the revelation of the God of all truth, and when we place our faith in Christ, he becomes the source of all wisdom and knowledge, as Paul writes in Colossians 1&2. But the Christian gospel is supra-rational, beyond human knowledge and ability for us to fully comprehend—how that a holy God could love and forgive sinners, and how that his incarnate Son could become our substitute in his suffering and death and thereby accomplish our forgiveness and redemption.

And, even after we trust Christ for salvation, we continue to live by this faith as trust in God “against the odds. Paul says Abram did not grow weak in his faith, even as days and years dragged on when there was no fulfillment to the promise. So, Paul quotes our text, “This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness’” (Romans 4:22).

The kind of faith that saves is a faith that trusts that God’s delays are not his denials, and that God’s will must be done in his way and in his time. Saving faith doesn’t bargain with God, and say, “If you do this for me, then I’ll be willing to submit to you. Saving faith comes to God in full trust and complete surrender. That’s what is meant by calling on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation (Romans 10:13).

Saving faith is all God’s work and gift and is...

#### Apart from merit or effort

It’s interesting that Abram had already demonstrated great faith and complete obedience by his going to the land of promise. Yet the Scripture clearly says that it was when Abram believed the Lord that he was credited with righteousness. This is the thrust of Paul’s arguments and using Abraham as an example in Galatians 3 and Romans 4. God wanted Abram and Sarai to become “nothing” so that his grace and saving power might be everything. God waited until the body of Abraham was “as good as dead” (Romans 4:19).

Saving faith is faith that reduces us to nothing before God that he might raise us up. And as we received Christ Jesus as Lord, we are to continue to live in him (Colossians 2:6), taking the way of the cross and death to self, that Christ might live in and through us (Galatians 2:20).

This is the great truth and also the offense of the gospel—that we are saved by grace alone. This great truth is to many, including the religious leaders of Jesus’ day and the Judaisers of Paul’s day, simply too good to be true. Even those who profess faith in Jesus Christ sense the need to help God save us, by requiring of ourselves and others good works, rituals or a passing grade that somehow earns God’s favor. But the cross of Christ evermore tells us that nothing we can do or become

ourselves could ever cover our guilt for our sins. And all we can do is trust and accept what Christ has done for us. It is...

### By grace alone through faith alone

God told Abram to count the stars, and if he could, he would know the number of his spiritual offspring (verse 5). But this was an impossibility, and even today the best astronomers cannot count the stars in all the galaxies and quasars. And there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. If there were any other way for God to save us and make us his restored, forgiven children, there would have been no cross. This Jesus makes clear in his Gethsemane prayer. He asked the Father, if there was any other way to save the world apart from the looming cross, then by all means do it (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46). There is nothing we can ever do to add to what Christ has done for us. And saving faith, the kind we see in Abram is faith...

### Issuing in obedience

As someone noted, Abram was not saved by faith *plus* works, but rather he was saved by a faith *that* works (Wiersbe, 48). Abram went on from this encounter with God to continue a life of faithful, though not perfect, obedience. We noted last week, how that after a lapse in his faith, going down to Egypt, that Abram returned to the land of promise, and marked that return with worship at Bethel, the "house of God." Saving faith involves repentance, which is a change of mind and a change of heart, resulting in a change of direction in our lives.

Abram's saving faith would be the source of his strength that would enable him to pass the supreme test of his life, the offering of his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22). This act of faith, according to James, is what demonstrated that Abraham had saving faith (James 2:21-24). Faith that saves us is a faith that continues to enable us to obey and follow and trust God, through all of life's tests. As was true in Abram's life, saving faith is faith that continues to act on God's word, even before the evidence.

And saving faith...

### Results in our righteousness

"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Verse 6). *The Message* paraphrases the second half of this verse as "God declared him 'Set-Right-with-God.'" Abram, by grace through faith alone, was made right with God. And so is anyone who believes in God through faith in his word and promise.

This verse has connotations from the world of the faith of the people of God, whose sacrifices were brought to the priests, who would declare those sacrifices to be either acceptable or unacceptable. And God declares as acceptable the faith of Abram, as he does the faith of all who come to him sincerely to receive his free gift of salvation.

This verse also has accounting imagery. God posted a deposit, as it were, credited to Abram's account. Abram, apart from God's gift, would be spiritually bankrupt before God. But when Abram trust in God and submitted to his Lordship, then God made a deposit into his account, and credited him with a balance that he could never have achieved by himself.

So, by grace through faith, Abram is declared acceptable and paid for in full, resulting in his being made right with God.

Abram received...

### *Righteousness as a gift*

Here is Abram, in all his need and weakness. Although he is to be admired as a hero of faith (Hebrews 11:8ff), he is nevertheless weak and in many ways Abram fell short of the ideal. Like us, he too was a sinner in need of grace. And he received God's declaration of being righteous, which means that all barriers between God and him were removed. His sins and all of his guilt were removed. The blessing of being made right with God means Abram received the blessing of Psalm 32:1-2:

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven  
Whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose  
spirit is no deceit."

One translation of verse six reads that "the Lord reckoned to Abram righteousness." To reckon is to count, estimate, compute. It also means to regard, consider, to settle accounts and to calculate. And the related noun, reckoning, means "the act of instance of reckoning; account, bill, a settling of accounts, as on a day of reckoning (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*). The Lord regarded Abram's sin debt "paid in full." The matter of his guilt had been settled. And of course, the actual payment of that sin debt was to take place some 2,000 years after Abram, the day when Jesus suffered and died for his and our sins.

The Dutch word used for a bill to be paid is *de rekening*. In the restaurant after the meal you are given *de rekening*. The utility companies will faithfully send you *de rekening* for the charges you have incurred. And, when we have saving faith in Jesus Christ, God reckons in our favor. He credits us with have been paid for.

One of our former IBC members shared a lovely story with me, how that he answered the call of God to resign his well-paying job to enroll in seminary classes. This brother of ours was concerned how he would pay the tuition for these classes, only to discover that one of his prayer partners had already paid his bill in full. That's what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. His suffering and death, the blood he shed, was adequate to pay for the sin debt we all owe to a holy God.

But lest we think of saving faith in just forensic or judicial terms (what is known as "imputed" righteousness), we need to understand that primarily saving faith introduces us into a personal relationship with the living, loving God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Saving faith results in our...

### *Righteousness as a relationship*

Saving faith doesn't just give a new legal standing with God and an entrance into heaven when we die. Faith that saves is faith that brings us into a personal, life-changing relationship with God. James remarks, after he quotes verse six of our text, that Abraham "was called God's friend" (2:23. See also 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8). Salvation is primarily a relationship with God. He forgives and accepts us as though we had never sinned, just as the waiting father received the repentant prodigal son (Luke 15:20).

It's a relationship about which we can be sure. God formed a covenant with Abraham, binding him to him forever. And the strange ceremony we read about in verses 7-20 served as a sign to Abraham that God would not forsake this covenant. And we are given signs of God's covenant with us—the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, symbolizing our new life and his body given and blood shed for us. He gives us also the promises of his word, that we might know for certain that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). John's first letter also gives us the assurance of salvation based on our right belief, right behavior and love for one another as signs to assure us of eternal life. And we have the witness and seal of the Holy Spirit, God's deposit guaranteeing us eternal life (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). And as the fruit of the Spirit abound in us (such virtues as love, joy and peace) we are given assurance of the abiding presence of Christ, this relationship with God as our friend who stays closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

But this gift of God's righteousness becomes more than a gift and relationship. We need to see also...

### *Righteousness as a pursuit*

Righteousness is what God imputes and imparts to us as his friends. But our commitment as God's children is to pursue after righteousness in our daily experience. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to live by kingdom priorities. We are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to us (Matthew 6:33). People who have been saved by grace will demonstrate in their lives the active pursuit of the cause of righteousness. We desire to grow in holiness. We want more of God in our lives, and want to be more like him in character and conduct. We yearn and serve that others might enter the kingdom of righteousness. We want to see society conform more to God's standards for righteousness and justice.

Saving faith is deeply personal, but it is not to be private. We are to share our faith with others, and are to live out our faith in loving community with others, and are to join God in his kingdom work of changing lives and society.

Saving faith is not stagnant, but rather is growing faith and persevering faith. It's not a perfect faith. Abram was to again falter, particularly in relationship with Hagar and Ishmael, he was to show impatience and doubt concerning God's promises. But Abram did continue to grow strong in faith, says Paul, and give God the glory (Romans 4:20).

## **Conclusion:**

So, here at IBC this morning there are people from all walks of church life; with all kinds of church creeds and confessions of faith, and various rituals and symbols associated with the teaching of salvation/saving faith. But I hope we can all agree that saving faith is faith that responds to the message of Jesus Christ with a response of helplessness, openness, trust and obedience. Our faith must be simply in Christ, the one who spoke to Abram, who rejoiced to see his day. Saving faith is simple enough for a child to understand. We all must enter as children before God, yet we must continue to grow into mature spiritual adulthood.

Christ wants for us what he gave to Abram, grace to believe and for trust and obedience to him as Lord. Simply, God wants a relationship with us. He will forgive and put us right with himself. And he will allow us to walk in step with him as we live by faith and grow in faith, just as we are saved by faith. He wants to be, as he was with Abram, our friend, one who sticks closer than a brother (James 2:23; Proverbs 18:24). As we are strengthened in our faith and as we grow in faith, we serve the ultimate purpose of our salvation—the glory of God (Romans 4:20). Saving faith is not primarily for our benefit, but rather that through our worshiping lives, God might receive more glory and honor.

Each one of us here has the potential to be, like Abram, a hero in faith (as we see in Hebrews 11:8ff). It's not up to our ability. It's up to our willingness to allow Christ to have the controls of our lives and to lead us according to his will. That's the way of faith. Faith that saves is faith that keeps on trusting, walking, waiting and hoping.

No one need leave this worship center today without saving faith.

## **Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision (verse 1). How does the word of the Lord come to us today?
2. Abram was prepared to accept second best for his life in proposing that a servant in his household be his heir, instead of a son born to his aged wife Sarai. In what ways do you accept second best in your life in terms of spiritual matters?
3. God gave to Abram a revelation of himself in verses 1-5, to encourage Abram's faith. What are some of the truths about himself that God revealed to Abram?

4. In verse 6, what did Abram have to do in order to receive God's credit of righteousness? What do we have to do to merit or gain our salvation? Read Romans 4 before you answer.
5. Whereas Paul emphasized that Abraham was saved by grace through faith alone (in Galatians 3 and Romans 4), James emphasized, in his letter, James 2:20-24, that genuine faith will prove itself by works. Can both be right? How so?
6. In your own words, describe what it means for God to credit to us righteousness (verse 6).
7. In what ways are we to pursue righteousness and also our relationship with God?

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