



“NO DISTRUST”
REV. GEORGE ALLAN BRADLEY, O.S.L.
ST. ANDREW’S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 2005

Romans 4:13-25

Some of you may have noticed the white Chevy Cobalt parked in the place where you usually saw my silver Malibu. Well, Audrey bought that Cobalt for me last Thursday! And she drove all the way to Harlingen to buy it. A Chevy dealer there bought back the Malibu we purchased from them five years ago—even paid out the remainder of the loan—to sell us the Cobalt. Audrey negotiated the whole deal. And there’s nothing new in that...she bought the Malibu, too! And I am v-e-r-y thankful.

Some of you will think, “Aw-w-w-w, isn’t that love?” Others will think, “Is that guy fortunate or what!?” The response to those thoughts would be a resounding YES!!! But a closely related issue is trust. Remember, even little cars press some budgets these days. So the question is whether or not Audrey is a good steward of our resources. Before y’all go off on me for impugning Audrey’s character, please remember that we all ask that question even if we ourselves are doing the buying because it is prudent always to weigh our ability to pay. But early in our marriage I had to learn if Audrey could be financially trustworthy in an age when women by law could not normally contract without their husbands’ approval. Of course, you know the answer also was YES, and I’m proud to report that Audrey has an A-1 record of nearly 39 years as the primary purchasing agent of the Bradley family.

Now, I use this awkward story to illustrate the point that our faith in God is not based on law, but on experience, and experience follows revelation.

God, without introduction of any sort, said to Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” in Genesis 12:1-3. In verse 4 the Scripture records, “So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot with him.” The wonder in this transaction is twofold for me: first, that God trusted Abraham to be a blessing (remember, even Abraham was born into sin); second, that Abraham, at 75 years of age, trusted God enough to get up and go.

There is another transaction we must hear and envision. When Abraham tells God that his household slave, Eliezer of Damascus, will be Abraham’s heir, God says, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir” (Gen. 15:4). The transaction continues: *He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness* (Gen. 15:5-6).

And another transaction in Genesis chapter 17: God says to Abraham, “No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5). Over and over God says such words to Abraham until the old man “...fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” God said, “...your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac.... But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sara shall bear to you at this season next year.” And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham (Genesis 17:21-22). And we all know that Abraham and Sarah had Isaac (*he laughs*) in due course; and Isaac had Jacob, who supplanted Esau, Jacob whom God renamed Israel (*the one who strives with God*), Israel who had twelve sons whose names *their* children took as tribal names. And

their descendants went into the land of Canaan some four hundred years later, as God had also told Abraham. And from their descendants, through Mary, came Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, the Savior of the world.

This is the faith that Abraham had. His faith came from God's self-revelation, and God confirmed Abraham's faith through the experience of *God's* faithfulness. Only during the Israelites' desert wandering—after being delivered from slavery from Egypt—did God give the law to Moses for these twelve tribes to enable them to form a society and live together under God's rule. In all of this history, God kept showing his steadfast love to Abraham and his descendants through deliverance and providence. And Abraham's faith, being as steadfast as God's love for Abraham, was the basis of God's attributing righteousness to Abraham. Abraham *trusted* God and the promises God made and *never wavered*. Did Abraham have questions? You heard one of them. Was the question intended to be the basis for disbelief? No, it was not for disbelief, but rather for verification.

Just so, Paul compares our faith in Jesus Christ to Abraham's faith. We are now asked to examine ourselves because we are asked to believe in that God who raised this Jesus from the dead, and in so doing, gave us freedom from sin and gave us justification (that is, being made righteous and in fellowship with God) through faith. We have first God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. We have the demonstration of God's steadfast love in Christ's "death for our trespasses" and the breaking of the wages of sin, death, through Christ's resurrection. Our experience of God's love *follows* God's self-revelation, and our faith in God's covenant promise to deliver us (that is, every human) is as independent from the Law of Moses as Abraham's faith was.

To the extent that you and I have believed in God through our experience of Christ's redemptive work on the cross, in the grave, and Resurrection Sunday, we have staked our very lives on this faith. But God is trusting us, too. God trusts that our faith turns into the kind of discipleship that makes us a repository of blessing for the nations. If through our faith God reckons us righteous, then we are to be a blessing to the families of the earth—all the families of the earth without exception.

This isn't a question of our "being good." It isn't a question of "doing what's right." It is a question of God's setting the conditions for us to actually *be* righteous through the work of Jesus Christ by removing the chains — the self-imposed slavery — of self-centeredness in thought, word, or deed that substitutes us for God, and of our receiving Christ's work. This removal of bondage lets God and us talk, as it were, and live and work together as family. God *gives* us this gift; we need only *accept* it, as Paul writes, *For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham...* (Romans 4:16).

Humanity long ago showed that sin and the human condition makes us untrustworthy. God has made up for sin in the work of Christ on our behalf. We only need to accept Christ's work. If we say we accept Christ's work, and thus the fullness of God's promises through Abraham to Christ, then we ought to show evidence that we have accepted God's gift of deliverance.

Jesus said that we were to be witnesses to all the nations...well, first he said this to Jews who than had to go to Gentiles. Once they had stretched themselves to deal with people they considered to be filthier than pigs, then besides Greeks and Romans, Iberians and Gauls, Britons and Scots and Celts of Ireland, Ethiopians, Syrians and Medes and Persians, Indians and Arabs all heard this wonderful message of deliverance. Paul and others from "the circumcision" gave up their exclusivism to extend God's love by word and deed to all the nations they could, and when their generation died, another carried on the work. From those generations to ours, people have been willing to proclaim God's love to others both like and unlike themselves. We in North America are only among the latest beneficiaries of the gospel. Africans and Asiatics are later even than we if we

count evangelism to the countries of those continents in the last hundred and thirty years or so. You must know that the centers of Christian vitality are in South America, Africa, and Asia today, not in Europe *or* North America.

And so God has trusted us with this message of word and deed. We must not be haughty, or think that we dole out *noblesse oblige*. Our only privilege is to serve Christ in the world by offering Christ to and serving people who live around us. We are not blessed to be *possessing*, but blessed to be a *blessing*. We are not to keep to ourselves alone, but, as John the Theologian of Patmos writes in Revelation, we are to “prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings” (Rev. 10:11). We must go beyond ourselves to witness in word and deed to the love of God, whatever we have experienced, so that others may also come to “the throne of grace with boldness, so that we [all] may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). If there has ever been a time to rely upon the Holy Spirit to make us little dynamos of Christian outreach, that time is now.

All sorts of people are spiritually hungry. We can feed them from the Source of all feeding, Jesus Christ. Some of us may be spiritually hungry, and the caches of spiritual food are here in study and action, if we will avail ourselves of them. Nevertheless, like Abraham, we must unwaveringly trust God to deliver on his promises. Jan DeHaven drew a poster for a youth lock-in last year that read something like: “I trust you to behave well; don’t make me have to change my opinion.” God must be able to trust us to deliver on the promises we made at our baptism, confirmation, or profession of faith.

Let there be no distrust between us and God. Let there only be trust in two directions. God makes a way where there is no way. Let us walk in God’s way. Let us be faithful like Abraham, and love as God loves.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.