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# 7<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JULY 7, 2013

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## WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FAITH

Pastor Jim Dunn

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### Romans 4:12-25

**12** ...and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

### The Promise Realized Through Faith

**13** For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. **14** For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. **15** For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

**16** That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, **17** as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. **18** In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” **19** He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

**20** No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, **21** fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. **22** That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” **23** But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, **24** but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, **25** who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

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It's one of the most famous photographs of all time. It shows a full-color red, white, and blue American flag standing against a background of black and white. An eerie light shines upon this American flag and upon the strange looking being standing next to it.

This flag looks not as if a wind is blowing it, but as if it's been starched or frozen into a perfect rectangle. In fact, there is no wind where this flag is standing. There is no air there. So, what appears to be one big black eye ball on the strange-looking being is really the facemask of an astronaut's helmet – his fully enclosed helmet. And what of the clumsy looking box on his back? Well, that's how he breathed in that place with no air. There is no air there, no wind, no atmosphere, and no water. So, the tracks made by this astronaut's moon shoes in the fine moon dust are still there. It's now almost 45 years since this photograph was taken of an American flag and an astronaut standing together on the moon. Yet, his footsteps can still be seen.

Paul describes some similar footsteps. Footsteps still warm from the feet of our spiritual fathers and mothers, of Jewish descent. They were circumcised, like Paul and John and Peter. They lived by faith as their father, Abraham, had. They walked "in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham." Romans 4:12.

Would you like to place your ten little piggies in those same footsteps? Isn't that the legacy we want to leave for our children? That we lived by faith? Forty-five years from today, don't we hope that there will be some who walk in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham because they followed in our footsteps? This week, my son and I were talking about what he will remember about me. He said what he'll remember about me is a person who needed to be in bed every night by nine o'clock. I admit that if I stay up much past ten I have a tendency to become silly and laugh for no reason. But what I'd really like to be remembered for is that I faithfully walked with my Savior. Wouldn't you?

Well, walking in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham means believing, continuously believing what God says. Now, what God said to Abraham and Sarah was that they would have a son, though "his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old -- and that Sarah's womb was also dead." Romans 4:19.

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Abraham's response is in the next verse, Romans 4:20: "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God...." So, walking in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham means unwaveringly, continuously believing what God says.

The truth is we are given more credit for believing what God says than we deserve. Case in point, is what God says to us in Hebrews 4:13: "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword." If we believed that unwaveringly and continuously, then God's Word would always be the first place we'd turn for help, inspiration, healing, joy, consolation, hope, and the people closest to us would know that about us. Can we honestly say that is the case? When someone else's hopes are dying, do I have a Bible verse ready for them, because it helped me? Do you? Not very often.

The truth is, we could not breathe into someone else what we had not first breathed in for ourselves. When I think of the astronaut in the photograph with the American flag, I think: He could not breathe on the moon, unless equipped with oxygen. If he was going to be able to exhale, if he was going to be able to take even one more footstep, he had to be able to inhale. He could not exhale what he had not inhaled. Nor could we exhale God's Word into someone else's problems when we had not inhaled it for ourselves. But when we have had problems, haven't we been more likely to rack our own brains for solutions, or looked to others for help, or poured ourselves a stiff one for consolation, or sought some form of escape?

What we see here, though, with Abraham, is someone who received a little CPR from time to time. Sure, Paul generously gives Abraham credit for believing what God said. "Abraham did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God." And then in the very next line Paul writes: "...but he was strengthened in his faith..." Why would Abraham need to be strengthened if he never wavered?

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Thing is, Abraham and Sarah had their moments.

- When they needed to be strengthened in the faith.
- When some new life needed to be breathed into their faith.
- When they thought that Abraham having sex with Hagar could fulfill God's promise of a son.
- When Abraham and Sarah laughed at God's promise of a son.

At those moments, the Lord performed CPR on their faith. The Lord breathed into them what they would not inhale for themselves. Remember the Lord's CPR to Abraham and Sarah. He sent them angel visitors. (Genesis chapter 18) He appeared to Abraham in a vision. (Genesis chapter 15) He appeared to Abraham in person. (Genesis chapter 17)

All pointing ahead to when the Lord would do more than give us spiritual CPR or give our faith more credit than it deserves. God's appearances to Abraham and Sarah pointed ahead to the day when He would "give life to the dead and call things that are not as though they were." When the Lord appeared by sending His own Son. And through Jesus' death and resurrection breathed life into us who were already dead, who had no faith at all. And through Jesus' innocent suffering and death called us who are not righteous, righteous. As though we had always turned to God's Word first. As though our faith had never needed to be strengthened. And through Jesus' footsteps to the cross and His footsteps away from the tomb, the Lord will on the Last day call us good and faithful servants though our legacy has not always been that of faithfully walking in the footsteps of the faith.

How much more than generous is God? He gives us more than the spiritual CPR He gave Abraham and Sarah. He does more than appear to us. He goes with us. He walks with us.

It is interesting to note about astronauts today that when they go to the International Space Station, a medical doctor is sent with them – someone who knows a bit more than CPR.

The Holy Spirit is sent with us. Towards a greater reliance on God's Word in every situation; towards becoming the very thing God calls us, good and faithful; towards more faithfully walking in the footsteps of the faith, the Lord proclaims this Word to us of our sin and of forgiveness in Jesus' name and through it the Lord breathes into us His Holy Spirit, to walk with us. So that we breathe in God's Word and take another step, ready to breathe God's Word into someone else's dying hopes.

Amen