

Proper 14C – Those who wait on the promises of the Lord do not wait in vain

1. What is the longest that you've ever had to wait for something?
 - a. That question's getting harder to answer in our society as we don't have to wait for much anymore nor do we want to (we're impatient)
 - i. Do you remember back to a time when not everything was available in every corner of the country and every store?
 - ii. When you had regional specialties and had to wait to go on vacation in those spots to get them (certain fruits, lobster, stores, etc)?
 - iii. Or you had the Sears catalog and had to wait for orders to come, maybe even a whole year until Christmas?!
 - b. But of course, that's all changed in today's world
 - i. We can get fresh fruits and vegetables year-round as well as most regional food specialties
 - ii. Go to any mall or shopping plaza and you'd think you'd never left home – there's very little in the way of variety, the stores are the same
 - iii. And Amazon has taken care of having to wait for mail-order
 - iv. We don't even have to take time to prepare meals, whole gourmet meals are prepared and shipped to you
 - c. So, imagine having to wait for *decades* for something you really want
2. That's what we see in our OT lesson today – Abram waiting on the promises of God
 - a. As this scene opens Abram is about 90 years old, and he's been waiting on the promise of God for at least 15 years
 - i. When God first called Abram, he wasn't even in Israel, he was in the land of Haran in the east.
 - ii. Scripture tells us that God calls him at age 75 saying, **“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And 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 him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (Gen 12:1-3)
 - iii. Listen to the promises, they are the foundational promises of the nation of Israel and even more importantly for Christianity - the promise of a Savior for the entire world
 - iv. God would give land to Abram (Israel), and descendants for Abram (the Jews) and through him all families on earth will be blessed (a Savior)
 - b. Up to that point Abram did not have any children and yet he followed God's call and headed off for the land of Canaan, Israel
 - i. But to have descendants you need children and Abram was already old

- ii. And now in our reading 15 more years have passed, and he still doesn't have any children and you can see even his faith is wavering as he tells God, **"O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"** (Gen 15:2)
 - iii. Abram was making preparations for his inheritance to go to one of his servants, who could blame him? 90-year-olds don't normally have kids
 - c. But God tells him, **"This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."** (Gen 15:4)
 - i. And just as Abram's call provides the foundation for the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, and the promise of the messiah what happens next provides the foundation to our understanding of salvation.
 - ii. As God's Word says, **"And [God] brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."** (Gen 15:5-6)
 - iii. Abram's faith was credited to him as his right standing with God, not anything he had done but rather what he believed.
 - iv. Those who wait on the promises of the Lord, like Abram, do not wait in vain.
 - d. This episode in Abram's life offers us the key to our right standing with God as Paul tells twice in the NT, in Romans and Galatians
 - i. In Rom 4 he says, **"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."** (Rom 4:2-3)
 - ii. And again in Gal 3, **"just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham."** (Gal 3:6-7)
 - iii. Our right standing with God was made possible by the One who was promised to Abram in Gen 12 – that was the promise of a messiah, Jesus
 - iv. And our faith is like Abram's is counted as our righteousness as Paul concludes from this passage, **"But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his [Abram's] sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."** (Rom 4:23-25)
3. Unlike any other religion in the world which says we must try harder to prove that we are worthy of God, in reality God makes us worthy when we trust in His promise

- a. Our loving God knows we can't get it right, no matter how hard we try, no matter how brilliantly we shine for one moment, we'll just fall in the next
 - i. Abram is a case in point – just after this magnificent display of faith, in the very next chapter, he falls.
 - ii. Genesis 16 starts, **“Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.”** (Gen 16:1-2)
 - iii. The Bible is full of examples just like that, great displays of faith one moment followed by stunning failure the next.
 - iv. Like the Apostle Peter who confidently asserted that he would die with Jesus one moment and then denied him three times just a few hours later
- b. That is why our salvation and standing with God can't possibly rest on what we say or do because we'd never be certain that we're saved
 - i. And in every other religion in the world, there is no certainty there's only the hope that you pleased God
 - ii. But when you put your faith in the promise of God that we have been reconciled with Him by what Jesus did for us we are declared His forgiven children for Jesus' sake, made righteous by what He did for us
- c. Listen to our text from Hebrews, **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”** (Heb 11:1)
 - i. Abram at 90 couldn't have seen how he was going to have a son, but he believed the promise of God...he had the assurance of God
 - ii. Our reading goes on to say, **“And without faith it is impossible to please him.”** (Heb 11:6)
 - iii. That's because a heart that trusts in God trusts in the only source of all things, the One who provides for all of our needs.
- d. God's Word tells us through Isaiah, **“but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”** (Isa 40:31)
 - i. Put your hope and trust in God alone, as Abram discovered when he fathered Isaac at 100, He makes the impossible possible
 - ii. Those who wait on the promises of the Lord do not wait in vain.