Have you ever been lost? I'm not talking about just-missed-my-last-turn lost, where all you have to do is backtrack a bit. I'm talking about being so lost that you are disoriented. The kind of being lost that makes even stubborn men break down and ask for directions. It is not a real comfortable situation, especially if it is getting dark, and there do not seem to be many landmarks. Perhaps the first step in getting back on the right track is having someone along who helps you to face the facts that you are lost.

The fact is we have all been lost that way, with no hope and no help. We all came into this world lost in the darkness of sin. That darkness would have continued to all eternity if God had not helped us face the facts. On the basis of God's help to him, Luther has taught us: I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. Peter tells us that such help is also ours when he says: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Paul uses the example of God's promise of a son to Abraham as a reminder that God enables us to face the facts. Facts of our complete helplessness, of his gracious power and of his certain promise.

Let's go back a few thousand years to the day when God called Abraham. Out of all the people in the world, God chose this one man and invited him to follow him to a place where he would lead him. In the process God promised he would make Abraham a great nation. And Abraham followed. Some time later, with not a single heir in sight, God took Abraham outside and told him to count the stars and said: So shall your offspring be. Astoundingly we are told: Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Twenty-four years after God first called him, there was still no child. Yet at the ripe, old age of 99, Abraham still believed, even though earthly evidence was totally non-existent. Paul tells us: Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about 100 years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

But why did God wait so long? The Lord wanted to make it very clear that Abraham was absolutely helpless in making God's promise come true. It was without question that it was God's doing when that 100 year old man's wife gave birth when she was 90 years old.

Scripture teaches us exactly the same thing when it comes to saving ourselves. God tells us and every other human being to be holy and gives us his 10 Commandments as a guideline of how to do it. All we have to do is love our Lord completely and our neighbor as ourselves. But lest we think that we can earn own our way into heaven by means of God's law, Paul also tells us earlier in Romans: Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. Later in Romans he also tells us: For the wages of sin is death.

God is very blunt when he tells us that we cannot generate any good. In fact he tells us through Isaiah: All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. Ezekiel drives home the seriousness of it by
reminding us that **the soul who sins is the one who will die**. Just as a physically
dead person can do nothing physical, so God tells us that we are spiritually dead, so
we know we can do nothing spiritually. The Lord pounds home our complete
helplessness so that when we come to the realization that we cannot do anything, we
realize our need to turn to him.

When you are lost and you stop for directions, you hope the person you ask will
have the ability to redirect you, even though you know that the person cannot
physically place us where we need to be. But when God enables us to face the facts, he
points us to his gracious power.

Abraham was fully confident of God’s gracious power. Paul tells us: **Yet he did
not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened
in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to
do what he had promised. This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.**
Abraham struggled and tried to take things into his own hands by having a child with
his wife’s servant, Hagar, but he never stopped believing in God’s power. He believed
God. He took him at his promise.

And in doing so, God himself was glorified. In Abraham we do not see a great
example of what Abraham could do. We see the great things God can do in the life of
one of his people. It was the Lord's gracious power that enabled him to believe. God
the Holy Spirit took that physically dead man and gave him a son. He took that
spiritually dead man and created new spiritual life within him. He enabled Abraham to
grasp what the Lord was saying and to hang on to it.

God has also done for us what he promised through Ezekiel to do for Israel: **I will
give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your
heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.** His power removes our spiritual
deadness and gives us a living, Christian spirit. He empowers that spirit to take him at
his Word. He enables us to accept what he chooses to bring into our lives, whether it
is happiness or frustration, whether pleasant times or challenges. His power enables
us to continue to trust him whether he answers our prayers immediately or chooses to
make us wait.

What a wonderfully gracious God! His power gets us on the right road. With the
psalmist David we rejoice that **he does not treat us as our sins deserve.** But what
can we do to continue to tap into that power? Satan knows that if he keeps us away
from God's Word our spiritual batteries will begin to run down. We know, however, that
when we regularly hear, read and study God's Word, the Holy Spirit will continue to
work in our hearts. He will continue to enable our faith to grow by his gracious power.

When you face the facts that you are lost and you finally ask for directions, you
almost hate to hear a person say: **You can't miss it.** Often it seems when we hear
that it is a guarantee that we will. But what God promises to do for us is dead certain.

God enabled Abraham to have that confident perspective. Paul writes: **Against
all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations,
just as it had been said to him, So shall your offspring be.** The NIV's translation is
weak here. A better translation: **Abraham in hope believed that he would become
the father of many nations.** His belief did not make it happen. If that were so, Paul's
whole argument of salvation by grace would fall apart. It rests on God and his grace.
Paul closes our text with these words: The words ‘It was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. God made good on his promise that one of Abraham’s children would serve as a blessing for all nations in the person of Jesus. Abraham did not see the fulfillment of that promise with his physical eyes, but Jesus did say: Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad. With the eyes of faith Abraham saw God's promise as good as fulfilled.

We too have to rely on the eyes of faith, but with that faith we too see God's promises fulfilled in Christ. If we read God's Word, we cannot miss it! We can look back over the whole plan of salvation and see God fulfill his promises. We know that Jesus took our place under his Father's law. We know that he kept all of his Father's commandments for us. We know that when he died, he was doing that for us.

And on top of that, his resurrection serves as proof. 1 of our Seminary professors paraphrased text this way: Christ had to die because we had sinned, but he could be raised to life because we had been justified by his death. To the Romans, to us, and to people of all times, our Savior-God bids us to look at his finished work and extends the invitation, 'Accept what I have done for you; trust in it as your hope of righteousness before God. This is fact based on God's certain promise.

Facing the facts that you are lost on the highway can be a bitter pill to swallow. It is hard sometimes to admit that you do not know where you are going. How sad it would be if we refused to face the facts that we were lost on the road that leads to eternal life. But God brings his truth home to us through the words of Paul to the Romans. He helps us to see the facts that we are completely helpless, but that God gives us all the benefits that come through his gracious power and his certain promise. God grant us the faith to trust his Word so that like Abraham he might credit us with Christ's righteousness as well. Amen.