

ESF, Lord's day service message

2/5/2017

Hope Against All Hope

Romans 4:16-25

16Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17As it is written; "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-the God who gives his life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.18Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it has been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-since he was about a hundred years old-and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, 21being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification

Hope is an essential element to sustain man's life.

Dr. Emil Brunner said, "What oxygen is for the lungs, such is hope for the meaning of human life." A human being can live about 40 days without food, roughly 3 days without water, and nearly 3 minutes without air, but not one minute without the sense of hope.

Hope can be a powerful force of strength. How many times have we heard of people who have endured incredible hardships, overcoming "impossible" situations, simply because they refused to give up hope?

The Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, was about to launch a great campaign. It would be trying and difficult. It would mean slogging across the mountains, into unknown and dangerous territory. His campaign would require the hearts and loyalties of his officers and men. Alexander won the loyalties of his soldiers by distributing throughout his army all the wealth at his disposal. To each one he gave money or property until all his own resources were gone. One of his generals, Perdiccas, then asked Alexander, "Sir, what have you reserved for yourself?" Alexander's answer was brief and to the point. "For myself I have kept only hope." "Hope". Then Perdiccas responded, "We who share in your labors will also take part in your hope."

Then where does hope come from? How can we live with hope always? How can we make our hope real?

Hope comes from God's faithful promise

Promises are the source of our hope. A child's security depends on a parent's promise to keep him or her safe. A spouse can live with confidence because of a mate's promise of fidelity, loyalty, and love. Businesses depend on promises from employees, vendors, and clients. Countries remain safe when neighbors keep their promise to honor their borders.

But hopes may be gone in all of these situations when promises are broken. However, there is one promise which is always kept and never broken. It is the promise of God. He has given us hundreds of promises in His word, and He keeps every one of them. Numbers 23:19 says, *"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"*

In Abraham's hope came nothing but the promise of the faithful God. Notice the phrase of verse 20: "...*regarding the promise of God.*" The promise was that God would give him a son when it was impossible for him and his wife to have a son (Genesis 12:1-4, 15:4). When God told him the promise he was 75 years old and his wife was 65 years old. It was impossible for him and his wife to have their own child. But by trusting in the promise of God, Abraham had hope that he would be able to have his own child at that old age.

So, it was God's promise which created Abraham's hope. God's promise was the only source of his hope.

Even if all conditions and situations become hopeless, we still can have hope if we receive God's promise.

Have you ever been hopeless? Although you have done everything you can to solve the problems in your life, are they still there? Can't you find any solution at all? Then listen to the promise of God for you. Whatever you're struggling with, God has a promise for you. Even if you are facing a hopeless situation, you can hope against all hope if you hear and claim God's promises. There are hundreds of God's promises in the Scripture, and you can believe every one of them.

Here are some typical promises of God which gives us hope always:

.To meet our every need (Matthew 6:33- *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*)

.To comfort us in all our troubles (2 Cor. 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles,...*)

· To protect us in all hardships and dangers (Isaiah 43:2 *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire,*

you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze.)

. To heal all our sicknesses (Exodus 15:26.. I am the Lord who heals you.)

. To encourage us in our pain caused by people (2 Timothy 2:12 If we endure, we will also reign with him.)

. To strengthen us in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9 ...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness...)

When you are hopeless and need hope against all hope, immerse yourself in these promises. Keep the promises in your heart and trust in the faithfulness of God who will surely keep all His promises. Then those promises will provide hope to you always.

Hope continues by God's persuasion

While we live with hope in God's promise, we need to know how to keep the hope alive. Because the hope may become weak or even disappear as our situation changes or gets worse.

While Abraham was living with hope in God's faithful promise, the years slipped by. Abraham became older and Sarah's womb remained barren. His situation was not getting better but getting worse.

Genesis 17 records the account. Abraham was ninety nine years old. Since he received God's promise to give him a son, 24 years had passed away. During those 24 years, Abraham and his wife Sarah did everything they could to have a child while they put their faith in God's promise. But they could not have a child. By all human standards, their situation became even more hopeless. Abraham should face the fact that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb was also dead. His hope of having a child was about to fade away. His hope was being replaced with doubt.

But he overcame the doubts and his hope remained alive. Verse 20 says: *“Yet he did not waver through unbelief...”* How? Whenever he fell into doubt and whenever his hope became weak, God persuaded him that with His almighty power, He would surely keep the promise and he would surely have a son. In Genesis, God repeatedly reminded Abraham of His promise – in chapters 13, 15, 17. God knew that Abraham was struggling to remain in hope in a hopeless situation. So, God repeated the promise until Abraham believed it. Whenever Abraham’s faith became weak, or whenever he almost lost his faith, God came to him and strengthened his faith and helped him to regain his faith. God persuaded him to remain in faith. It was God’s persuasion that enabled Abraham to continue hoping against all hope.

When our situation is getting worse, when our hope is almost gone, when we have no reason to remain in hope, we need to hear God’s word of persuasion. Although the content of the promise is the same God persuades us in different ways. Whenever we are struggling with doubts in the promises of God, God Himself will fortify our faith. Look at the phrase in verse 20: *“...but was strengthened in his faith...”* The word *“strengthened”* means to “put power in,” like when we put gas in our cars.

When we fall into doubt of the promise of God and our hope becomes weak, God persuades us with His almighty power. God strengthens our weakened hope by persuading us with His word and vision.

What doubts do you need to deal with to revive your dying hope? Tell God about your doubts. Be like the father who was struggling with the hopelessness of his son’s healing. He cried out to Jesus: *“if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!”* (Mark 9:22). And the Lord helped him believe by saying, *“If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes”* (Mark 9:23). Let the Lord strengthen your faith and

revive your hope.

Hope becomes reality only by faith

After Abraham and his wife received God's promise of having their own son, they believed in the promise and waited for many years. But when they could see no sign of having a son, they gave up on waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. So, they followed their own idea to have a son. It was to have a son by taking another young woman-Hagar as Abraham's second wife. By doing so they could have a son- Ishmael (Genesis Ch.16). Abraham and Sarah tried to make their hope real by their own effort. But what they got through their own effort did not fulfill their hope. The son Ishmael brought many troubles into their lives rather than making the hope real.

Then did God reject Abraham because of his failure? No, He did not. God intervened in his failure and helped him in the departing of Hagar and Ishmael from his care. And God encouraged him to continue believing in His promise and waiting for His accomplishment no matter how long it might take. God helped him recover from his failure and keep moving forward with faith. As God encouraged, Abraham believed in God's forgiveness and grace. Abraham believed in God's way of redemption. Abraham believed that God would enable him and his wife to have their child. Although he and his wife were dead people in terms of their ability to give birth to a child, Abraham believed that God would revive the ability.

It was nothing but his faith which God credited to Abraham as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Finally, through that faith, God enabled him to have his own son (Genesis 21:1-5).

Only by faith, can our "hope against all hope" become a reality. The key of hope in all promises of God is Jesus. Through Jesus God

keeps all His promises. Through Jesus, God makes our hope real.

Fresh out of Oxford, John Wesley became a parish minister in England. Later he became a missionary to American Indians along the coast of Georgia. His ministries were far from successful. Disappointed and discouraged, he returned to England.

During the voyage, his ship was raked by a raging storm. Wesley and most of the people on board were frightened. But there were some people who remained calm. They were Moravian missionaries. Noticing their behavior, Wesley asked if they were not afraid. "Why should I be afraid," one answered, "I know Christ." What the Moravian missionary meant by "I know Christ" was that Christ gave him hope for life after death. So, he was not afraid of death.

Imagine someone makes a large cash deposit into your bank account for you; you did not work for it, ask for it, or deserve it. You never have to pay it back. You merely have to acknowledge it and accept it to be able to draw upon it. This is what God has done for you in Jesus Christ. He has credited to your account the most valuable deposit possible—the gift of eternal life. You did not work for it, ask for it, or deserve it. You never have to pay it back. But it is yours—just because you believe in Christ and accept Him.

All you need to do is claim the gift with faith in Jesus. If you do, you can always live with hope against all hope.