

ESF, Lord's day service message

6/5/2016

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.

There is a story of self-made millionaire Eugene Land, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Land had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of

these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

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

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

Hope comes from God's faithful promise

Promises give the hope of our heart. 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 hope 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?"*

Abraham's hope came from 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 faithful promise of God, Abraham hoped that he would be able to have his own child at that old age. Because of God's promise, he was able to hope against all hope. So, it was God's promise which created Abraham's hope. God's promise was the only source of his hope.

In December 1988, a terrible earthquake almost flattened Armenia. It killed over 30,000 people in less than four minutes. One father rushed to his son's school and found the building flat as a pancake. Standing there in tears, he remembered a promise he had made to his son, "No matter what, I'll always be there for you!"

It looked absolutely hopeless, but the dad went to the back right corner and started digging in the pile of rubble. The other grieving parents tried to pull him off, saying, "It's too late! They're dead!" But he just kept digging for his son stone by stone. He dug for 8 hours, then 12, 24, 36 hours without stopping. Finally in the 38th hour, as he pulled back a boulder, he heard his son's voice. He screamed his son's name, "ARMAND!" And a voice answered him, "Dad? It's me. Dad!"

Then the boy added these priceless words, "I told the other kids not to worry. I told them that if my dad were alive, he'd save me and when he saved me, they'd be saved." He remembered his Father's promise: "No matter what, I'll always be there for you!" Fourteen children were saved that day because one father was faithful. But how much more faithful is our heavenly Father!

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

Have you ever been hopeless? Although you have done everything you can to solve the problems in your life, you still have problems. 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 hopeless situations, you can hope against all hope if you trust in God's promises. There are hundreds of promises in God's word in the Scripture, and you can believe every one of them.

Here are some of God's promises in which we can find hope:

.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 weaknesses (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 those promises. Keep the promises in your heart and trust in the faithfulness of God who will surely keep all His promises. And the promises will provide hope to you always.

Hope remains alive 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.

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 of giving him a son, 24 years had passed. 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 were unable to have a child. By all human standards, the circumstances looked more hopeless. Abraham should face the fact that his body was as good as dead and that his wife, Sarah's womb was also dead. His hope of having a child was fading away. His hope was almost gone.

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 of the promise 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. God knew that Abraham was struggling to remain hopeful in a hopeless situation. So He 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- in chapters 13, 15, 17. 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 be encouraged by the word of God. Although the content of the promise is the same God encourages us in different ways. Whenever we are struggling with

doubts of 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 encourages us with His almighty power. God strengthens our weakened hope by encouraging us with His word and vision.

What doubts do you need to deal with in relation to the specific situation you are facing right now? Tell God about your doubts. Be like the father who was struggling with doubts of the Lord’s ability to heal his son when he said in Mark 9:24: “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*” Let the Lord strengthen your faith.

Hope can be fulfilled only by faith in God’ grace

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 did not see any results, they got tired of waiting for their son. So they followed their own idea of having a son. It was to have a son by taking another young woman, Hagar as Abraham’s second wife. By doing so they had a son- Ishmael (Genesis Ch.16). Abraham and Sarah tried to fulfill their hope by their own effort. But they were unable to fulfill their hope. The son Ishmael brought many troubles into their lives rather than fulfilling their hope.

Did God reject Abraham because of his failure? Did God nullify His promise given to Abraham? No He did not. God intervened in his failure. God helped him resolve his failure by giving him another promise. God promised that He would take care of Hagar and Ishmael. With God's promise, it was easier for Abraham let Hagar and Ishmael leave him and Sarah (Genesis 21:8-21). And God encouraged him to continue believing in His promise and waiting for His fulfillment of the

promise no matter how long it might take. God helped him stand up again 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).

What we "hope against all hope" will be fulfilled only by faith. The key to hoping for the promises of God is Jesus. Through Jesus God keeps His all promises. Through Jesus, God makes our hope real. Ephesians 1:3 says, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

Imagine that 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 withdraw 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 His Son and accept Him. All you need to do is claim the gift with faith in Jesus.