

Crossroads Baptist Church
March 4, 2007 10:00
Romans 4: 17-21
Romans #22

“One Essential Ingredient while you wait - Hope”

When you go through tough times or you have not received the answer to an often asked prayer, what do you do? Do we give up? Or is there reason to go on? I believe through the example of Abraham and Sarah that we get some insight into how to endure and eventually triumph.

The most essential element we have in our Christian life to help us endure is hope. “Hope is to the soul what oxygen is to the body.”

I. Hope is born out of a promise of God.

A. Hope is born in promise from God.

But somehow Abraham found it within himself to believe what God had said. If you go back to Genesis, you find that God repeated the promise 5 times—in Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, 21. It's as if God is saying, "I know you find this hard to believe, so I'm going to repeat myself until you believe it." If you are looking for hope, then search the Scriptures daily and diligently and claim the promises written therein.

Promises are the hope of our heart.

B. Hope is borne up by the God of the promise.

The promise is no better than the person making the promise or their capability to carry out the promise.

The promises of God are backed by God.

Look at verse 17 – “the promise was made in the presence of God,....”

Then he gives two qualifications for God:

1. The one who gives life to even the dead;
2. The one who calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

Unfortunately, hearts and relationships are broken in all of those situations by unkept promises. There is one Promise-Maker, though, who can be trusted completely and without fear. That one is God. He has given us hundreds of promises in His Word, and He keeps every one of them.

Don't forget that its only the faith of a mustard seed that moves mountains. So its not our faith, but our faith is in.

Abraham looked at the One Who made the promise, at God Himself. It is not a question of how little or how big one's faith is; it is a question of how big one's God is! What kind of a God is He? There are two things about this God that helped Abraham tremendously: (1) He is the God who gives life to the dead -- the God Who makes dead things live, Who takes things that once were alive, vibrant, and full of life, but have died and become hopeless, and brings them to life again. (2) He is the God Who "calls things that are not, as though they were." He calls into existence the things that do not exist. He is a creative God.

II. Hope endures our trials.

Hope endures because it begins right. Verse 19 (NASB) “Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body,”... Abraham believed God, but he didn't believe God blindly. Abraham contemplated his own body. "Contemplated" comes from the word "mind," which has the idea of understanding. Abraham fully understood what he was up against.

He was 99 years old and Sarah was beyond child bearing age. John Calvin said that these two were closer to their death bed than their marriage bed.

Real faith does not have a plan B. It has no option whatsoever. When you contemplate what you are up against, you have to decide, "Do I believe God or do I believe what I see? I don't walk by sight, I walk by faith. God said it, I am going to stand upon it."

Hope does not give up but even hopes against hope. Verse 18 tells us how he did it. Abraham "hoped against all hope." The Cottonpatch Version says it this way, "He kept the faith even when the cards were stacked against him." It has the idea of hoping even when all human reason for hope is gone.

Verse 20 – he did not waver. The KJV uses the word “stagger” which Vincent in his NT Word Studies says it carries the thought of a mental struggle. This word means that he did not withdraw or re

III. Hope is strengthened by faith.

The type of faith that Abraham had to exhibit was not the type that he could help God out. He had to believe but his faith was not based on a fairy tale or a wish, but the promise of God.

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by with Word of God.” Romans 10:17

Not only did it produce something in Abraham, he did not at all waiver in his promise because he grew strong. The word "grew strong" would be better translated as "he was empowered by his faith." It comes from the word *dunamis*. *Dunamis* is the word that means ability, power, capability. He had no capability until he put his faith into what God said. Then the capability came. Then the power came. But it also happened to Sarah. You might want to look in Hebrews 11:11-12. It says, "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him [God] faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants* as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore."

The hope sustained his faith. The Bible says in verse 20 that “he did not waver at the promise of God.”

Listen carefully. Abraham had his doubts. That's natural. Who wouldn't. He was a man, not a plaster saint. He had his doubts but he didn't dwell on them. That's why we're talking about him today. Sure, he had doubts. Doubting isn't a sin. It's what you do with your doubts that makes a difference. You either fight through you doubts or you give in to them. It's just that simple. Faith is always a struggle, always a battle, always a conflict. If faith were easy to come by, it wouldn't be faith.

The point is, Abraham doubted and wondered what God was up to . . . but he never gave up! He was 75 years old when the promise was first given but 100 when Isaac was born. You must have something to sustain your faith in those days.

IV. Hope brings the greater glory to God.

Verse 20 of Romans 4 says they were "giving glory to God." The word "glory," *doxa*, means recognition, proper estimate. How can God get the proper recognition in your life and in my life? Only when we step out on what He says. Because when we step out on what He says, we are stepping into his power, not our power. And God, when He does it, brings the glory back to Himself, not to us. That is what faith is all about.

Jerry Hansen's Five Stages of Panic

Stage # 1: "I know God will take care of me." This is that brave moment at the beginning of the crisis when faith fills your heart and in full assurance you proclaim

that God has the power to pull you out of the mess you're in. You smile a lot, you whistle, you laugh, you joke because you know it won't be long before the miracle comes.

Stage # 2: "I think God will take care of me." The second stage kicks in after about a week. You're still smiling, you're still laughing but not as much now. You still believe in the miracle but God seems to be taking his sweet time getting around to it. As the days pass, little arrows of doubt find their way into your heart, but you rush to pull them out. "Any day now," you say, "Any day now."

Stage # 3: "I hope God will take care of me." Now you've been in this crisis for a month or more. The smile is gone, the laughter dies on your lips, the jokes seem forced. Deep in your heart you're beginning to plan for the worst. What-ifs fill your mind and cloud your confidence. Satan seems to have appointed a demon to sit on your shoulder and make fun of you. Still, in your better moments you believe God can come through for you, but your doubt is almost as big as your faith.

Stage # 4:

"Ain't no way God will take care of me." You hit the fourth stage not long after the third stage. At this point doubt has won the battle and faith has been routed from the field. Anger and despair replace hope and joy. It's all over now, and you've lost. What a fool you were to trust in God! He never meant to help you. Filled with recrimination and accusations, you lower the flag and give up. You've been beaten.

Stage # 5: "I don't know how he did it, but God took care of me!" This is always the final step. Somehow, somehow God took care of you. You got the job, you found the money, you made that phone call, you forgave the unforgivable, you battled back from the bottom, and now you're on your way to the top again. How did it happen? As you look back, you're not sure. You are sure of only one thing: God did it! You had nothing to do with it.

Romans 5:5 “Now hope does not disappoint.”

This message is for us. Listen to the Message translation:

Abraham didn't focus on his own impotence and say, “It's hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child.” Nor did he survey Sarah's decades of infertility and give up. He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said. That's why it is said, “Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right.” But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrificed Jesus made us fit for God, set us right with God.