

Hope Against Hope
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GFC – 11/7/2021

We are in a sermon series called Moving Forward in Hope. As I was praying about what to preach on this week – 2 phrases kept coming to my mind: “Hope Deferred” and “Hope Against Hope.” I knew what those phrases meant because they are both Bible verses. Proverbs 13:12 says:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

Romans 4:18 says:

In hope against hope Abraham believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken.

So, I’m preaching a message called Hope Against Hope.

Abraham had to deal with hope deferred because of a seemingly hopeless situation and we’re going to learn from his example what to do with hope deferred and situations that seem hopeless.

All of us have to face hope deferred. Hope deferred is hope delayed or prolonged. All of us face situations that seem hopeless.

And many people stop hoping because they feel they’ve waited too long. They stop hoping for anything because they can’t deal with the disappointment of hope deferred.

Remember, hope is faith for the future. It is confidently believing something will happen in the future to the point you prepare for it. But – when you lose hope you stop preparing for anything good. In fact, many people start preparing for something bad to happen.

So, how do we have hope when we’ve become hopeless? Today we are going to look at how Abraham faced a hopeless situation. Let me give you the back story first. In Genesis 12:1-2

The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.”

Abraham was 70 years old when he received this promise from God. A few chapters later, Genesis 15:1-6 says:

The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can You give me since I remain childless?" You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

Well, time goes by and hope keeps getting deferred, so in Genesis 16:1-2

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Hear me closely – trying to fulfill the promise of God in your own way and your own wisdom never works! It only causes you greater problems.

From the moment Hagar got pregnant, she despised Sarai and then Sarai blamed Abram for something that was her idea. And that son – Ishmael – is still causing problems today! Ishmael is the father of the people who became Muslims. Think of all the bloodshed and terror that has happened because hope deferred caused Abraham and Sarah to take matters into their own hands!

Be forewarned! Never try to bring about a promise from God in your own strength!

So more years go by, and in Genesis 17:1-19

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless. I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations." God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."

After even more waiting, Genesis 18:10-15 says:

Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and

Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind Him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But He said, "Yes, you did laugh."

I love that the Bible reveals that both Abram and Sarai laughed at the promise of God. It shows how unbelievable, impossible and hopeless it was to them. But in Genesis 21:1-5

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him... Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born.

So – 30 years after God told Abram he would be the father of a great nation – he finally has a son. After years and years of hope deferred. After years of problems because they tried to make it happen on their own. After all of this – what can we learn from the life of Abraham and Sarah about hope? We read what the Bible says about it in Romans 4:17-22.

(As it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, against all hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

This is such an awesome example of godly hope and faith. And we can learn from this example how to have hope when we feel hopeless and helpless.

1- To have hope, we must believe the word of God

Abraham believed God even when there was evidence to the contrary. And when God gives us a promise, Satan will make sure there are other options for us to consider - options that are contrary to God's promises.

Let's not consider the other options. Let's choose the will of God and when the other options come to us, we will defeat them.

God should be the source of our hope and expectations! We can have expectations that our family puts on us. We can have hopes that we put on ourselves. But those can be unrealistic expectations. They can be personal fantasies rather than words from God. God must be the source of our expectations. Psalm 62:5 says:

My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.

When God is the source of our expectation, we will not be moved. We know we've heard from God and we stand in faith even when we have to wait. And you will have to wait. That's always part of the process. When God is the source of our expectations we have faith to persevere.

David had to wait 12 years between being anointed as king and actually becoming king. Noah waited 100 years before the rain came. Abraham waited 30 years before he received the son God promised. God worked in all of them during the time of waiting.

So, please don't fret over the length of time God is working in you. Remember, the intensity of what God wants to do through you will determine the intensity of the preparation. So, trust the timing of God. You could be one year, one month, one week, one day or one hour away from a sudden move of God in your life. Embrace the preparation time. It is truly not wasted time.

2- We must trust the character and power of God

Abraham believed in the reliability of God. He believed in the promise of God. Romans 4:17 says:

He believed God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

He believed God had the power to bring life out of death. He believed that God calls those things that do not exist as though they do exist. Now this is an important principle here that many people misunderstand. It does not say to call those things that ARE as though they ARE NOT.

For instance – when God created the world, He spoke it into existence. He did not say, “There's no darkness. There's no darkness. I'm confessing that this darkness is gone.” No – He said, “Let there be light.” He called that which was not in existence into existence by His word.

I've had friends who never admitted when they were sick. They thought it would be a bad confession or unbelief. But faith is not denial about a situation. Rather, it is confessing the truth of God's word about that situation. Denial does not work.

Every time Jesus healed someone, He asked them, “What do you want me to do for you?” If they were like some of my friends, they would have answered, “What do you mean? I’m not sick. I don’t need anything. I’m okay.” And they would have gone away unhealed in their denial.

No – those who got healed by Jesus first admitted their blindness and said, “I want to see.” They admitted their paralysis and said, “I want to walk.”

It took faith in Jesus and speaking what they wanted Him to do. Likewise for us today – it takes faith in Jesus – receiving a word from Him and speaking it in faith.

Abraham had to do that. He had to tell all his friends about His promise from God and his name change. When he had no children, he had to ask them to start calling him “the father of many nations.” That would be tough to do, but because Abraham chose to speak in faith he become the father of many nations.

We must do the very same thing! 2 Corinthians 4:13 says:

We have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, “I have believed, and therefore have I spoken.” We too believe, and therefore we speak.

What do we speak? Hebrews 10:23 says:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

The Greek word for confession is homologeo. It comes from 2 words – which literally mean “to speak the same word.” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon says it means “to say the same thing as another.”

To say the same thing as whom? That’s where you choose.

God wants you to agree with His Word; Satan wants you to agree with his words. God wants you to say the same thing He is saying; Satan wants you to say the same thing he is saying.

Your words either agree with God or they agree with Satan. Your words either say what God says or they say what Satan says. If you want to have hope in hopeless situations, you must begin to speak what God says. It’s not enough to read the word or know the word; you must speak the word! You can’t even get saved without speaking the word! Romans 10:10 says:

For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.

It is important to act on our faith in God and His Word even as Abraham did and call those things which are not, as though they are.

So, if you are feeling weak in hope, do what Joel 3:10 says:

Let the weak say I am strong.

No, you are not strong in your own strength! But you are strong in the Lord and the power of His might!

3- To have hope, refuse to focus on things that are contrary to God's word.

Abraham did not consider his own body, already dead and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Romans 4:19 says:

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.

Obviously, Abraham knew he and Sarah were too old to have children. But what he saw in the natural was not as important as God's promise. He focused on the word of God.

What dead thing are you considering? A dead marriage? A dead-end job? People waver when they consider things they should not be considering. Instead of considering other options, we should be like Abraham - fully convinced that what God has promised He is also able to perform.

4- To have hope, count the promises of God as done even when they are not yet done in the natural.

Abraham saw himself as the father of many nations before he ever had a child because he expected it to happen. He did not waver in doubt.

5- To have hope, do not waver through unbelief

Romans 4:20-21 says:

He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised.

Abraham was facing an absolutely hopeless situation, but he did not waver in unbelief. He believed in hope because he was fully persuaded that God would do what He said He would do. When we waver – it shows that we are only partially persuaded.

If Abraham had wavered in unbelief, it would never have come to pass. We know that because James 1:6-8 says that when we ask God for something, we must

Ask in faith with no wavering (no hesitating, no doubting). For the one who wavers (hesitates, doubts) is like a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not think they will receive anything from the Lord, for they are double-minded, unstable, unreliable and uncertain about everything they think and do.

Abraham had hope because he did not waver, he strengthened his faith and gave glory to God!

6- To have hope, strengthen your faith and give glory to God.

Abraham gave glory to God before the promise was fulfilled. He gave glory to God because He was fully persuaded, which strengthened his faith.

The Christian life starts with hope and results in praise, but Psalm 71:14 says:

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

When you are mature in faith – you always have hope. And you never stop praising. In fact, your praise is always increasing.

If you are struggling with hope or faith, the first thing you need is a word from God. Don't give up until you hear from Him. Romans 10:17 says:

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

When you know you've heard from God, faith and hope will rise up within you. Don't waver through unbelief. Don't let the waiting time discourage you. Take hold of the promises of God and don't let go. The Bible word for expectation literally means a cord – something you tie up something with. Something that binds you. What should your expectation be bound to? The promises of God. God's promises are true and His plans for you are good.

So strengthen your faith and give God glory. And like Abraham, give glory to God before you see your answer. Begin to thank God for what He is going to do. Call those things which are not as though they are! Have hope when it looks like all hope is gone!

Even when it looks like things are dead – have faith in God who gives life to dead relationships and dead careers and dead dreams!

No matter what happens – hope against hope!
 No matter how long it takes – hope against hope!
 Even when it looks hopeless to you – hope against hope!
 And express that hope by giving glory to God now!
 Praise Him in the waiting and your faith will strengthen in Jesus' name!