

Hoping beyond Hope

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Romans 4:18-25, ESV

Abraham had it all—riches, servants and honor. However, he did not have what he wanted most—a son. To Abraham having an heir, someone to carry on his name, meant everything. All of his life and fortune would be meaningless if there was no one to carry on his posterity, his likeness, into the future. Abraham wanted a son—someone he could pour his character, faith and values into, a son who carries the essence of his father into the future and a son whom he can love. Now a century old, he must choose to take God at his word. How could he father a son now? How could Sarah become pregnant for the first time at ninety years old? Is this some cruel joke perpetrated by a God who chooses to crush the hopes and dreams of an old man? For what possible reason would God wait so long to answer Abraham’s prayer? Yet beyond hope, Abraham chooses to hope and to place his trust in God.

Where are you in your story? What is it that you wish so much but lies seemingly well beyond your reach—perhaps beyond all hope? Can we believe against hope in times like these as Abraham did so long ago, or do we think it was too long ago and God no longer works as he did with Abraham? Economic times may press hard against you, stress at work may be crushing all of the joy out of you, or unanswered prayers rock your faith to the point that it seems that not even God cares. How do we live in times such as these? In hope we believe against hope. Look once more at Abraham’s resolve: “*No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised*” (Romans 4:20-21).

Careers, fortunes, friends even family may come and go, but God anchors the soul as life’s storms howl all around us. I cannot count on things or people even loved ones to comfort me, but I can count on God. When we live beyond hope, it seems we have no more prayers to ask but we still have a God who cares. Abraham, the father of the faithful, lived beyond hope. For decades he clung to the faint glimmer that God had promised him a son. God waited until there would be no doubt that this precious one-of-a-kind son was a gift personally from him to Abraham. I wish so much that we did not have to wait to receive our gifts from God, but the gifts are his to give and he chooses to give them when they will do us the most good.

Abraham’s story is not told to praise him but is told for our sake as well. If this is how God has worked in the best among us—to shape us into his image so he can instill a deep abiding faith, how do we expect God to work among us? Eternal happiness builds on having everything just as it should be—in other words, righteousness—and righteousness comes from faith, faith in God. When everything in my life is not as it ought to be, what do I count on? Is it God, or is it what I think I ought to have? Do I really trust God to keep his promises? More importantly, do I see that his promises work best through my trust in him? God promises good to those who love him and trust him because, ultimately, this is what heaven will be. Am I preparing to live there?

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