

To Hope Against All Hope

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon 'To Hope Against All Hope' emphasizes the power of faith in God's promises, exemplified through Abraham's unwavering belief.

Duration: 22:59

Scripture: Genesis 32:26, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 1:21, Romans 1:23, Romans 2:1-3, Romans 4:20-21, Romans 8:24-25

Topics: "Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Romans chapter 4 as a crucial chapter in the Bible. He begins by discussing Paul's description of humanity's lostness, including both the idolatrous practices of the Gentiles and the self-righteousness of the Jews. The preacher emphasizes that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. He also highlights the importance of gratitude and thankfulness towards God, as well as the descent of humanity into sin and idolatry. The sermon concludes with a call to trust in God's promises and to hold onto them steadfastly.

Transcript

Maybe one of the most important chapters in the Bible to be understood, to help us in our walk with God, richest, you could probably preach six months just from this chapter, and people have done that, is Romans the fourth chapter. Because Paul, in the book of Romans, presents a picture after his greetings to the church in Rome. He gives a personal reference about himself, that he's not ashamed of the gospel, and then he begins to describe humanity in its lostness.

Not only the Gentiles who were idolaters and bowed down to images made of stone and hideous practices that were going on then in the Roman Empire, hideous practices. Then he also says, but to the Jew who feels more privileged because your children are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and you have the Bible, and you know your Bible, but how can you look down on the Gentiles who you call barbarians and Gentile dogs? How can you look down on them? Because although you have the law, can you obey the law? Not talk about it, but did you obey it? And then he concludes that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And he talks about the descent of humanity away from God, way back before there was scripture to study, that they were not thankful.

They wouldn't thank God. That's something that draws us all away from God when we stop being thankful. Before idols came and all of that, they were not thankful.

Although they saw his creation, although they saw the sun, moon, stars, although he had blessed them with life and joy, they would not thank God. And then the descent really speeds up, and they turn to idols and to sin, and then not only immorality in the classical sense, but men burning in lust for other men, women with other women for with other women. And then he concludes, everyone with the law, without the law, we're all lost, and we're apart from God.

And the law can't help us because it keeps telling us what to do, but it doesn't help us to do it. Amen? I mean, it's there. It just keeps talking to us.

Don't do this, do that. And we keep disobeying one way or the other. So then he talks about how we gain righteousness, not by obedience to the law, which no one can have.

There's no meritocracy. There's no way to be accepted by God because of a good life that you live. But everyone, Gentile and Jew, is saved by faith, by putting their faith in Jesus Christ, what he did on the cross, that he's God's son.

So then he lays out the plan, and he says, if we confess our sins, turn from them, do a 180, and just look to God and put our faith in him, we shall be saved. And God counts us acceptable with him, and he counts us righteous, even though we're not righteous, but he counts us righteous. He imputes that to our record because of the righteousness of Christ, which is the crux of the gospel.

We're saved by someone else who died for us and rose again from the dead. How many say hallelujah to that? All right. He's breaking that all down.

And then he comes to Romans 4, and he's going to bring up a name that he wants both Jew and Gentile to know about. He says, you know, this is not something new that I'm concocting. All you people that are into Moses and the law, and that by obeying it enough, you'll get accepted by God.

He dismisses that as foolishness. And he goes back, and he makes this unique argument that the father of everyone who believes is not Moses, but someone who lived hundreds of years before Moses, and that's Abraham. And he says, Abraham, the just shall live by faith, and Abraham is the father of everyone who believes, Gentile and Jew, because we're going to learn he believed God, and God counted it to his account as righteousness.

God transferred righteousness into his bank account, and it wasn't his money. But when you look at it, he's righteous. You know, if you got a million in the bank, you got a million in the bank.

And if someone says, yeah, but someone else put that in there for you. Yeah, that's true, but it's still my million dollars. How many say amen? It's his righteousness given to us.

And he says that even the Jews who boasted about Abraham as my father and my Jewishness. He says, no, you're only really the sons of Abraham if you have the faith of an Abraham. It's not calling yourself a Jew that makes you a Jew.

It's a true Jew is the one who has the faith like forefather Abraham. So let's pick up these interesting verses. I'm going to read for a while because it's so important.

So the promise of eternal life is received by faith. It is given as a free gift, and we are all certain to receive it whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the

father of all who believe.

So notice what he's established. Salvation is a gift. If it's a gift, you can't brag that you did something because it's a gift.

Like I just gave you that analogy. Hey, I had a million dollars in the bank. Look at me.

Someone would say, how can you boast? Somebody put it in there for you. It is yours, but it was a gift. You didn't earn it.

So he said salvation is like that. Everything God does for us, brothers and sisters, is a gift. He's not paying off anybody.

He doesn't pay wages. You want to know about wages? The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. And many times we're trying to earn something from God like a paycheck at the end of the week because that's the world we live in.

But God says, no, no, I'm not giving anybody pay. I give gifts to those who believe. Abraham is the father of all who believe.

That is what the scriptures mean when God told him, I have made you the father of many nations. This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing. Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping, believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, that's how many descendants you will have. And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though at about a hundred years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead and so was Sarah's womb.

But Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger. And in this, he brought glory to God.

He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promised him. Come on, can we say amen to that? So this happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and creates new things out of nothing. Notice, dead and nothing, dead back to life, new things out of nothing.

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping, believing that he would become the father of many nations, because God had promised that. For God had said to him, that's how many descendants you will have, many nations. And Abraham's faith did not weaken.

So notice, you can have faith and then let it weaken. But Abraham's faith did not weaken. He not only grabbed ahold of the promise, he held on to it.

And even though months and years are going by, he's getting older, Saron is more barren than ever before. He somehow said, no, God will still do it. Yeah, but another year went by, nothing happened, but God will still do it.

He did not weaken in faith and say, I used to believe that, but now it's not looking so good. He didn't say that. He got stronger in his faith.

And the Bible says, Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger. And in this, he brought glory to God.

How did he bring glory to God? Because he had faith. When you trust God and it looks terrible and you keep trusting, that brings glory to God. That brings honor to God.

Listen, lifting our hands and singing, that's all great. Praise and worship has its place. But I know a lot of people who do praise and worship, and they don't have the faith of that bottle of water.

And it's faith that honors God. It's not working yourself up into a musical mood or a spiritual frame of emotion. What God was honored by was Abraham's faith.

Things were getting bleaker and worse, and he kept believing. Not only did he not waver, he got stronger. He said, now I'm more sure that God is going to do it.

Praise God. Praise God. The Bible tells us, and in this, he brought glory to God.

He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. So now, Paul's argument in this whole thing of Romans 4 is that the just shall live by faith. And he brings out one verse in Genesis, which he says is the root of everything.

It says in Genesis, not the New Testament, not in Moses and in Exodus. It says in Genesis, and Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. His faith counted as if he had obeyed every command of God perfectly.

That's how powerful faith is. He believed God, and when he believed God's word to him, God said, you believe me? Then I take that faith, and I count it as righteousness. You are now acceptable in my sight, not because you've done everything you should, but because you believe in me.

Oh, how God is trying to get all of us to believe in him, to believe in him tonight. That's what God's looking for, to trust him. He loves that when we trust him.

And now we learn that Abraham's faith, although things were looking bleak, because God gave these promises, but nothing was happening. He promised all these children, he couldn't even get the first son. And then remember, his wife got this crazy idea that if he would sleep with a servant woman, then have a child, that would like help God along.

But when you help God along, you blow up your life when you help God. And that made for a mess that's still going on today, many believe. Ishmael and Isaac at each other.

So he hung on to God, and he was getting older, and his wife is barren plus old. And he hangs on. Not only did he not weaken, maybe some of you, God want me to read this to you, because you're weakening in your faith for some word that God has given you, some promise.

And the waiting is getting you mystified and confused, like why am I waiting? But Abraham waited for a long time. And that's why he's treasured in the Bible. In fact, all of us, we're called nobody father, the Bible says.

But Paul says, no, Abraham, in one sense is your father. You never call a priest or a pope or a minister, anybody father. That's not allowed to us Christians.

We have only one father, which art in heaven. But Paul says here, Abraham is the father of us all, because whatever your background is, whether you're from Haiti or Israel, or if Korea or Poland, if you're a believer in Christ, Abraham is your father. He's the first one that it's written about.

And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. So Paul's argument is this, the law was added hundreds of years later, but that never nullifies God's original way of accepting people. The law was just given to prove people how hopeless they are, to try to get them to trust God, to prepare their hearts for faith.

And the law keeps making its demands. But by the law, nobody will ever be justified in God's sight. Amen? But by faith, we follow Abraham's example.

He believed God. What did he believe about God? He believed that a promise that God made him. And it was an astounding promise, not one made to you and me.

You know, I will make out of you a great nation. And you're going to have so many descendants, you won't be able to count them. That's not something God has said to you and I. But it doesn't matter.

Whatever the word of God is to us, Abraham is our example, because he held on to that promise. Let me close this. The two things that he grew strong in was this, that God can take something dead and make it alive.

That was figuratively spoken about him and his wife, because as to having children, they were dead, muerte, no hope. But he figured even though we're dead, God can make everything alive. That's what he believed.

That's an attribute of God. He takes things that are dead, not only physical resurrection. He takes situations that people go, you know what, I used to hope, I used to have, maybe you're here tonight, I used to hope, I used to think, oh God, one day, but you know what, it's the thing is dead.

The thing is dead. It might have could have, should have, but it didn't. It's dead.

I missed the boat. I made too many mistakes. For a while it was looking good.

Now it's not looking good. It's dead. And Abraham is telling us, keep trusting, because God takes dead things and makes them alive.

Come on, can we say amen to that? The other thing that Abraham learned was God takes things that are not and makes them into something. With what ingredients? Nothing. God doesn't need ingredients.

You know, my wife's going to make lasagna. She sends me out and I got to get all these things. Then I get home, she said, I forgot to tell you, you got to get this.

I got to go, ah, I go back out. How many husbands understand what I'm talking about? Because why? You can't make lasagna without the ingredients. Someone said, where'd that lasagna come from? What'd you use? Nothing.

No, I know, nothing, but what'd you use? Where'd you get the pasta? Where'd you get the ricotta cheese? Where'd you get the mozzarella? Where'd you get the crushed tomatoes? Lasagna has ingredients and you put them together right, they make a lasagna. God doesn't need ricotta cheese. He doesn't need

anything.

Right now in your life you can say, but I have nothing. That's fine with God. He takes nothing and makes it into something.

Come on, can we say amen to that? Dead back to life. Nothing, something. That's what Abraham was believing.

There's nothing, no hope. In fact, there's less hope now than there was last year, but he still believed. Oh, God have mercy and help us because we quit believing because things don't look good.

What would it matter how it looks to God? He made the universe out of nothing. You and I think it owes and looks this way. It looks that way.

God isn't looking at anything. God just speaks and it happens. Dead becomes life.

Nothing becomes something. He didn't weaken in his faith, but he gave glory to God by hanging on and trusting God. So I want to pray about this because we all have personal application of this.

Abraham had this word from God. He wasn't believing nothing. It's why you got to read your Bibles every day.

And as God makes promises, the Holy Spirit makes them alive. Now you got to hold onto that promise. He applies it to your heart.

Anyone ever had that happen? You read the word of God and God makes something alive to you. And you know what? This is for me. God is speaking to my heart like he spoke to Abraham.

And then what happens? Nothing happens sometimes. And time goes by. And now we're going to either be like Abraham and grow stronger in our faith, or we're going to toss in the towel, give up.

How many ministers must be tossing in the towel when they're leaving now at more than 1,700 a month from the ministry? Don't you think God ever spoke to them? Look, some might have been bogus in their call. Then it's not from God. But please don't tell me all of them.

They're as called as I am, as Pastor Petrie is, as Pastor Johnson is. They're called. But they didn't see it happen, and they gave up.

They lost the promise. This was what happened to the people of Israel. God had a promise.

I'll take you into the land. They couldn't hold onto that promise. No, they're too strong.

Jericho got walls. These people have weapons. We have nothing.

And because of their unbelief, because they weren't like Abraham, God said, now you're going to wander in the wilderness. I'm going to let you all die out, and I'm going to bring in a new generation that will trust me. Look, brothers and sisters, what God wants from us tonight is not screaming and yelling.

God wants more than anything. There's a time to scream and yell. He wants faith.

Prayers are not answered because you yell at God, and because they're long, and you get worked up. That's not why God answers faith. Jesus said, when you pray, believe.

Believe. Some of the prayers of Jesus, where the greatest things happen, are not even three sentences long, or one sentence long. Faith, the power of faith.

I know something of it, but then I know nothing. I'm in kindergarten. I want to know more about this faith that gives glory to God, that can see God take dead and make alive.

Dead hope, dead situation, dead, dead, dead. Nothing, nothing left. I have nothing.

And God says, that's fine. Just bring me your nothing. But trust me, and out of nothing, I can make something.

We're always looking for worthy ingredients. I got to bring something to God. Bring nothing.

Bring your nothing. You have nothing tonight? Bring it. He loves to work with nothing.

That's how He created the heavens and the earth, out of nothing. He just spoke the Word, and the whole thing happened. Come on, how many believe our God is a great, awesome God? Praise God.

We praise you, God. Come on, praise Him out loud. We praise you, God.

Lift your voice up, and give God glory, and praise, and honor. You're awesome, God. You're awesome in this place, mighty God.

You're awesome in this place, Abba Father. We praise you. We praise you.

We praise you. We honor you. We bless you, Lord.

We're not going to let the enemy rob that Word that you gave us, Lord, that promise that you gave us. To this church, to me, to Carol, to my brothers and sisters, to all of us here, the pastors, the leaders, the deacons, deaconesses, the congregation, Lord, the sound people, God, that which you promised you're going to do, Lord, and we're trusting you. We don't care what it seems like, and how hopeless it seems.

We believe against hopelessness. We hope against nothing that we see with our eyes. We still hope because we believe in you, God.

Praise God. If you're here tonight, and you want to just, you find, wow, Pastor Simla, that verse was so good. I needed that.

He did not grow weak in his faith. Situation was getting more negative, but he got stronger in his faith. Thank you, Jesus.

The situation was getting worse. His faith was getting better because he counted on God. He didn't look at what he saw.

He looked at God, and he held on to that promise, and he judged that whatever God says he will do, he will keep that promise as we trust in him. If you're here today, and you want to just plant your flag now in the sands of your life right now, and say, God, I am believing in you for that word that you gave me. Maybe I haven't even prayed it in months or even years, but now the Holy Spirit is rekindling that in me.

That which you once gave me, I've kind of let go. I've gotten distracted, discouraged, but tonight I'm going to follow Father Abraham, and I'm going to believe in Jesus. I'm going to believe in God.

Just get out of your seat and come up here. I want to stand with you because I'm claiming some things God has given me. Haven't seen them yet, but they're coming.

I'm going to tell God, God, I'm not letting you go. I will not let you go. Join hands with the person next to you.

Lord, we believe. We believe all things are possible. Lord, we believe.

We believe. We stand on your word. Satan, you're a liar.

We believe. Thank you, Jesus. Lord, we leave this building with a touch of heaven on our spirits, full of faith, hoping against whatever the devil says.

He's a liar, whatever. It seems like there's nothing. You make something out of nothing.

Ah, no, it's too late. It's dead. You make from the dead.

You make alive, and we want to give you honor and glory by trusting in you, not just singing to you, but trusting you, trusting you, living the life of faith like our father Abraham. So bless us now as we go in Jesus name. And everyone said, turn and give someone a hug and a handshake.

God bless you.

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