

Because He Lives 1 (Palm Sunday)

Against All Hope

Romans 4:1-25

Memory Verses: Romans 4:20-21

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

God never forgets a promise! We may forget... but He never does. The problem... waiting! Sometimes God's promises take a long time to reach their fulfillment. For example, Palm Sunday is not a beginning... it is the fulfillment of a millenia long promise. Palm Sunday didn't start in *Matthew 21*... it started in *Genesis 12:3* when God said these words to Abraham, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." And then 2000 years later, against all hope, that blessing rides a donkey into Jerusalem. And what do the crowds yell? "Hosanna." Save us now, bless us now!

The Palm branches waved and laid at Jesus' feet represent many things, but one of the most important is this... the Palm branches mean... God keeps his promises. God keeps his promises, though sometimes it takes a long time! And there is a weight to waiting. Why? Because sometimes the silence of waiting can feel louder than the promise itself. Think of the weight of the diagnosis that doesn't improve, or the prayer you've prayed for years, or the prodigal who hasn't come home, or the marriage that feels barren, or the ministry that feels fruitless, or the season that simply won't change. You know what God said, but you don't see yet what was promised. And if we are honest the delay starts to feel like a denial. Don't give up.

Today we begin a new series called, Because He Lives. Because Jesus lives I know that God keeps his promises! If God kept his promise to Abraham, if he kept his promise to the prophets, if he kept his promise to the cross, if he kept his promise to the resurrection... then we can trust Him with every promise he has made to us. Paul unpacks that reality for us in *Romans 4* through *8*. This isn't hard to swallow religious mumbo jumbo. No, this is oxygen for people who are tired of waiting. Because He Lives is about finally living.

So let's start today in *Romans 4:16-25*. Abraham didn't believe God when it was easy. He believed when it looked impossible. On Palm Sunday the crowd celebrated. On Good Friday it looked like the promise was dead. Our faith isn't put to the test when believing is easy. Our faith is made real when it comes up against something hopeless. *Romans 4* was written for people living between promise and fulfillment.

Abraham's body was "as good as dead." Sarah's womb was barren. The promise looked hopeless. Isreal was under Roman

oppression. No prophetic word for 400 years. The promise looked hopeless. But get this... what does *Romans 4* tell us? "Against all hope, Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised!" We worship a God who comes through in hopeless situations! Why? Because he is our hope and he always keeps his promises. This morning we are going to see that... Faith bridges the divide between what God said and what we see! Today, I want to quickly give you three ideas to help you remain faithful when the gap between promise and reality feels too wide.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first truth to help us remain faithful when the gap between promise and reality feels too wide is this... Belief Anchors Us to God's Promises. Let's look back at the beginning of this chapter in *verses 1-17*. Now I know that a lot of this seems like we are repeating what we've already heard. Righteousness, righteousness, justification, credited as righteous. I've preached on it. Don's preached on it. Hopefully you've received it. Abraham was not saved because he followed the rules. He was saved because of faith! And because he believed, God imputed upon him the righteousness of Christ. And he does the same to us all! We are justified by grace through faith!

But there is more here than just the doctrine of justification on repeat! Notice where the focus is. Not on the works but on faith in the promise. Before circumcision, before the law, before the nation of Israel... Abraham had one thing! A word from God! I will make you a great nation. Your offspring will be as great as the number of stars. Your offspring will bless the world. Look at *verse 13*. The promise didn't come by works... no it came by faith. Therefore the promise could never be fulfilled by us... it must be fulfilled by God! The only thing that connects us to God's promises is faith! Do we believe he will do what he said he will do?

Look at *verse 16*. That is why it depends on faith... so that the promise may be given by grace. Get this... this is so huge. God is waiting for us to believe so we can finally receive.

And finally take confidence in *verse 17*. God told Abraham 'I have made you the father of many nations.' God didn't say, 'I will,' but 'I have.' He calls into existence the things that do not exist. When God says it... its as if its already been done! We merely have to believe that he always tells the truth and always comes through. Our belief is our anchor.

God's promises to Abraham took 2000 years to be realized fully, but even in the waiting... they were being re-enforced. *2 Samuel 7:12-13* tells of a son of David who will reign forever. *Isaiah 9:6-7* tells of a child that will be born with the government on his shoulders. And *Zechariah 9:9* tells of a king riding on a donkey! The Isrealites waited and waited and waited some more for God to fulfill his promise and then *Matthew 21:1-11*. The joy of Palm

Sunday wasn't some kind of spontaneous parade. No, it was the accumulation of anchored faith!

Think about a ship in a storm. The anchor doesn't remove the storm. It doesn't calm the waves nor change the wind. It simply connects the vessel to something solid and unmoving. When the promise to Abraham seemed shaky... faith anchored him to God's word. When the promises to the Israelites, seemed hopeless... faith anchored them to God's word. When the gap between God's promise and our reality seems too great... Faith bridges the divide! **Faith bridges the divide between what God said and what we see!**

The second truth to help us remain faithful when the gap between promise and reality feels too wide is this... **Trust Perseveres Through God's Tests**. Let's look at **verses 18-19**. I want you to notice the reality of the situation. Abraham is too old. Sarah is too barren. The prospects of a child aren't just dim... they are non-existent. This is a hopeless situation. And this isn't Abraham's doing... this is nature... this is God. God purposefully made this promise to Abraham when Abraham and Sarah were too old for a reason... to test their faith! And Abraham was up to the test. Abraham believed in hope against hope. Why? Because Abraham knew something we don't. **Faith isn't pretending... faith is persevering!**

Abraham wasn't denying his reality... he was considering his reality... looking it straight in the face... and saying like Jim Carey in Dumb and Dumber... "so you're saying there's a chance." Even later, after Isaac was born, Abraham was given another test. God asked Abraham to take this promised child.. this miracle child... and to sacrifice him. But, again, **Hebrews 11:19** tells us that Abraham reasoned that "God was able even to raise him from the dead." He'll be dead... but God could raise him up... "so you're saying there's a chance." On Palm Sunday the crowds shouted Hosanna. On Friday Jesus was arrested. Later that day he was killed. But maybe God could raise him from the dead. "So you're saying there's a chance." There's always a chance with God.

Corrie Ten Boom is famous for her faith during her time in the Nazi concentration camps. After the war she said, "**Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.**" She endured unspeakable suffering... because trust persevered through testing.

Abraham's test was delay and sacrifice. Israel's test was delay and oppression. The disciples' test was disappointment and confusion. But when it mattered most.. there was still a chance! Their faith bridged the gap and withstood the test. **Faith bridges the divide between what God said and what we see!**

The third truth to help us remain faithful when the gap between promise and reality feels too wide is this... **Assurance Rests In God's Ability**. Let's look at **verses 20-25**. Abraham didn't waver... but grew even stronger in his faith. Why? Because he was convinced that God could and would do what he had promised. Abraham wasn't confident in his body. Abraham wasn't confident in Sarah. Abraham wasn't confident in the timing. But he was fully convinced in God's ability!

Again, on Palm Sunday... the critics saw a donkey. A donkey isn't a war horse. A donkey is a farm animal. This didn't speak power... it spoke weakness.. humility. But those who truly believed didn't put their faith in the donkey, or the symbolism, or the picture of strength or lack of it... They weren't confident in the things that most of us find confidence in. They were confident in God who keeps his promises!

Think of a tree. Where is its strength? In the massive trunk or tall limbs or encompassing canopy? No. it's in its roots. For years, roots grow underground before you ever see the height above the ground. Abraham's assurance wasn't in what could be seen above the surface.. but the strength that was invisible below the surface. Those who believed in the Messiah... their assurance wasn't in the world's projection of power. It was in the power of God. Again think of the 3 Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. They had no assurance of being saved... but regardless they would not bow down! **Faith grows strong when we become fully convinced that God is able even when we are not! Faith bridges the divide between what God said and what we see!**

Application

Belief anchors to the promise. Trust perseveres through the test. Assurance rests in God's ability. So will your faith in God bridge the gap between his promise and his delivery? Palm Sunday shows us that many lack that kind of faith. Cause they believed until the arrest. They trusted until the scourging. They were assured until the cross appeared. But Abraham shows us that our faith shouldn't be anchored to what we can see... but what God says! That's what bridges the divide. **Faith bridges the divide between what God said and what we see!**

Conclusion

This week, when what you see tempts you to doubt what God said, choose to anchor yourself in His promises. When the pressure rises and the timeline stretches, let trust persevere instead of panic. When your strength feels small, rest your assurance in God's ability, not your own. And whatever gap you're standing in right now, let faith bridge the divide between what God has spoken and what you see. When you are up against your next hopeless situation... let Abraham be your example and hope against all hope!