

## Promise's From God

Romans 8:12-25

A huge, brilliantly illuminated billboard called me to attention. It carried one simple message in three words: Keep Hope Alive. It was the most compelling billboard I had ever seen: keeping hope alive is one of the priorities of the United States during this pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. If hope dies, the country dies with it.

But we all need to keep hope alive. Hope is to our spirits what oxygen is to our lungs. Your spirit dies when hope dies. St. Paul the apostle understood the importance of hope. He tells us in the book of Romans, the eighth chapter, “for in hope we were saved.” Another translation has it: We are saved, but all we have to show for it at present is hope. Still another translation says: We hope we are being saved.

No matter which translation you like best, it comes down to this: living as a Christian is a life of hope. There are four things I want to say to you about hope. They are summed up in four words: Passion, Power, Pain, Promise. Hope is passion for good things we do not have yet, but which we believe are possible. I am talking serious hoping.

I am not talking about hoping that the Chicago Cubs will win another World Series, or that the White Sox will win the series during this shortened season. But about hoping for the things we need to make our lives full and complete and joyful.

For serious hoping, for passionate hoping, you need three things. First, you need a dream: nobody ever hoped for anything who did not first dream of what she hoped for. Second, you are to believe that what you dream about is possible. If you don't believe it is possible, you stop hoping.

But you need one more thing. You need a personal stake in what you hope for. Think of your hopes for your children. You hope they will live healthy, happy, productive, and good lives. And you can bet that you have a personal stake in their success. Dream plus

faith plus investment equals passion. Hope is passion for the possible.

Now the second word — power: Hope is the most powerful energy source in the world. Hope gives people power to achieve what they hope for. Some people think that poor people, hungry people, oppressed people change things because they are poor and hungry and oppressed. It is not true. People change things when they have hope that they do not need to be hungry or poor or oppressed any more.

A well-known Jewish philosopher asked this question about his people: How can we account for the survival of the Jewish people through all the exile and persecution? And this was his answer: The Jewish people have survived by the power of hope.

This nation was built by hope. People driven by hope said goodbye to their families, to their towns, and to everything familiar, take passage on boats and sailed to the United States in search of a better life. Driven by hope. This nation was built by the power of hope.

No painter ever set brush to canvass, no writer ever set pen to paper, no builder ever set brick on brick, no enterpriser ever built an enterprise without having hope that they could do what they dreamed of doing.

We have not begun to fathom the power of hope in creating better lives for ourselves. But there are limits. Hope can let you down. High hopes can crash on the rocks of reality and break your heart. And the higher the hope, the deeper the pain.

Here, then, is the third word — pain.

For the first decade of their marriage, Lewis his wife Doris hoped passionately for a child. They hoped and prayed for ten years. Then, finally, after ten years, Doris became pregnant. They thanked God and drank a toast to hope.

One night, about six months into the pregnancy, something went wrong. Lewis called the doctor and said: "Doris is going into labor. The doctor said, get her into the car and

bring her to the emergency room right away; I'll meet you there. Oh, yes," he said, "I have to tell you one thing. I should have told you before. Your baby is going to be seriously malformed."

"How serious?" asked Lewis.

"Very serious. It's up to you to tell Doris on the way."

He told her. They decided that they were not going to give up hope. So they kept on hoping. All through the night. At 6:00 a.m., the doctor came to Lewis with a silly grin from ear to ear: "You have a perfect baby boy. Come and see."

Lewis went with him; there he was, yelling his head off, looking just like Lewis. Praise God, they thought. We must never give up hope. Never give up hope. Two days later their baby was dead. Hope can break your heart.

As we gather here this morning, we could share the times when our high hopes brought up deep pain. So, what do we do when hope lets us down. A great writer named Albert Camus, after writing hopefully about the human struggle for many years, ended his career with this advice to the human family: stop hoping, think clearly, but stop hoping.

I am telling you to keep on hoping.

Sometimes when hope crashes down and crushes our spirits, we need to find a deeper hope, a hope that outlasts broken hopes, a hope beyond all human hoping.

And this brings me to the final word — promise.

Once the Lord gets inside our hoping, the odds change. Now we are not talking only about passion for what is possible. We are talking about passion for what is promised. The whole Bible story has one theme: The Maker of the Universe has come and made us a promise. And with that promise, God brings in a new dimension of hope.

There are two main hopes in the Bible. One of them is a hope for the future: we hope for a happy ending. We all want a happy ending. This is why we love fairy tales so

much. But this tale is true: in Christ there is a happy ending. Christ is going to win and make our whole world work right again. Life is going to win. Peace is going to win. Love is going to win, because God is going to win. This is what believers hope for the future.

But what we need is a hope for today. Not a childish hope that God will give us whatever we want. But a mature hope, hope that God will be with us and hold us up when we are walloped with a pain of fallen hope.

This is the hope God offers: I will be there with you when human hope fails.

Sometimes we feel that this last hope has let us down. Often it feels for all the world as if God is not here at all. He has left us. Abandoned us. Gone on leave of absence and left us to shift for ourselves. I have felt that way more often than I care to tell you. It is a terrible feeling because if God has abandoned us, our last hope is gone.

I want you now to think for a moment about Jesus and the Cross. Here was the best and brightest of all the ages. He was the one beyond all others in whom God lived. But now, he was in a situation that was as God-forsaken as any human situation ever was. Jesus himself felt that God had abandoned him, gone back on his own name; he wasn't the one who was with Jesus. He was the one who let him down. And Jesus protested: Why? Why? Why? And God was silent.

A couple of days later, before the fingers of the light had filtered through the mist of the early morning, while the citizens of the city were catching their second snooze, God went to work. A resurrection. Where was God when Jesus was hanging on the cross? He was there hanging and suffering with him. God is not only the God of the suffering; he is the suffering God. But then he came through with resurrection and life. There is hope when life is hopeless. God promised.

So keep on hoping. If you wonder whether your marriage can make it, keep on hoping. If you are worried about what your kids are up to, keep on hoping. If you are lonely and

need a friend, keep on hoping. If you are afraid you are going to die and it scares you to death, keep on hoping.

I began by telling you about the sermon I saw on a billboard: Keep hope alive. I went on to say that hope is four things: passion, power, pain, and finally the promise of God. I believe that God keeps hope alive in us. Keep hoping in God. God will not let us down. Keep hoping In Christ, Jesus will be with us till the end of the age. Keep hoping. God never fails on promises! Amen.