

Sunday, March 1, 2015

Written by Brian Lays, senior MDiv student, and brought to you by the World Mission Initiative at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Scripture

Romans 4:13-25

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") — the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." 23 Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Devotional

Hope is a peculiar thing. The Christian life, I'm told, ought to be characterized and defined by hope. In many biblical passages, hope is given an exemplary status, described as something we retain. Christ's work on the cross means that we have hope in the authentic reality that God is "for us." While this reality goes beyond strictly ourselves, we can control our participation in it. The Christian does not sit around wishing for something, but instead actively lives into hope by allowing it to transform his or her life. Hope must be a possession—something we hold onto, indeed cling to, and wield against life's slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. In this way, hope is not abstract and vague, but palpable and practical. It is something not to be studied or contemplated but embodied.

I want to contend that hope is something that we can possess constantly. Lent reminds us that life is finite, fragile, and, sometimes, quite difficult. Yet there is far more to hope than feeling positive and

happy. Sometimes, when darkness surrounds us, we realize how deep-seated the hope within us really is. The temporary disappearance of positive feelings does not necessarily imply that we have no longer have hope. We can still possess hope when it is beyond our conscious recognition. Hope keeps pushing us, often kicking and screaming, back to God. And once in a while, its light flickers in our souls, offering us a reminder that deep inside of us, beyond our present experience, hope is still at work by power of the Spirit, making us whole and leading us onward.

Prayer

Lord, give us a deep seated assurance that in life and in death, we belong to you. May this hope sustain us until we finish this race. In Jesus' name, Amen.