



Message: *Is It Wrong to Hope?* | March 1, 2026 | Speaker: Pastor Eddie Eddy

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:13-25 New International Version (NIV)

¹³ *It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.*

¹⁶ *Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.*

¹⁸ *Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

²² *This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³ The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

L: This is the word of God for the people of God. **P: Thanks be to God.**

"Is It Wrong To Hope?"

The season is upon us once again. It's just beginning...we're only a week into it. Every year this special season comes, and we are intentional about carving out extra time in our lives for something which is really important to us. It's not like other times of the year. Instead, during this season, for many of us, our thoughts and our conversations take a specifically different focus. Of course, most of you probably realize what season I'm talking about. Yep...we are just about to slip into the next season of American Idol on TV.

We got sucked into this show because our son is a musician and now, we are usually hooked. You know, I think one of the most entertaining parts of American Idol comes at the beginning when thousands of people audition

to become contestants on the show. Now the ones we end up seeing are the very best and the very worst. I have to believe that there are some contestants who are intentionally weird and sing unbelievably horribly just so that they will get their shot on TV and can have their brief 15 minutes of fame. They seem to have no sense of embarrassment, even though I find myself being embarrassed for them.

But the ones who get to me are the ones who genuinely hope they will become the next American Idol. They are convinced that they have such a great voice that they'll be the one in 100,000 people chosen as the best of the best, when the truth is...they couldn't carry a tune if it had handles. Then, when they don't get chosen to go on to the next round, they're crushed. They lash out in anger, or they cry a river of tears, and sometimes it's really a pitiful thing to watch.

I have to admit though, I do get this sense of gratification when the real arrogant ones get all bent out of shape and storm out of the room. I'm sitting at home watching this spectacle and wondering, do they really think they can sing? Have they never listened to themselves in the shower? Don't they have at least one honest friend that loves them enough to tell them the truth?

...have they never listened to the people who make it on this show? How could they seriously hope to win the competition against singers of such phenomenal talent? It's somewhat heartbreaking to watch people make complete fools of themselves, **hoping** for something that has no connection to reality.

Short Pause

So, the question that comes to mind for me is...Is it wrong to hope?

None of us can live without hope and living hopefully is undoubtedly an important part of being a Christian. But there is a huge difference between genuine hope and foolish hope.

Let's jump back to the Old Testament:

What if you were a 99-year-old man, married to an equally seasoned woman who has been barren all her life, and God comes to you and promises you that you're going to be the ancestor of a multitude of nations...how do you react? With 99 years of life experience...You know what you're hearing is impossible. And...this word isn't coming from some palm reader in a shack down by the railroad tracks who's speaking to you...you're hearing this from God who you have trusted so many times before.

Here is how Abraham reacted...He believed that it would happen just as God promised. We call that faith, trusting in the promises of God, trusting that God is going to do what God has promised to do, even when it sounds like it might be impossible... especially when it sounds like it might be impossible. Believing God's word is faith. Anticipating the realization of God's word...That's genuine hope.

PAUSE

In today's lesson, the Apostle Paul says Christians have a lot in common with Abraham. Abraham was made righteous before God, not because he followed the law, the law hadn't even been handed down yet, but by his faith and by trusting in God's promises.

You see, during Paul's time in history there was a big controversy going on in the church. People wrestled with the process of becoming a Christian. The question was about whether or not Gentiles needed to become Jews before they could claim themselves as Christians because the earliest Christians were Jewish. They believed that there was a progression and that was how it worked.

First you were a Jew who followed the Jewish laws and then you could **also** become a follower of Jesus. Being a Jew seemed to be a prerequisite for becoming a Christian. So, when the Gentiles heard the good news of Jesus and wanted to be a part of this new way of redemption, it created conflict. One of the biggest hurdles for becoming Jewish, especially for men, wasn't something you'd want to go through unless it was absolutely necessary.

As a missionary to the Gentiles, Paul was particularly sensitive to their plight. Paul was a slave to the law most of his life. He was a Pharisee. He lived by the rule of law and was confident in the fact that he had done well at it. He also had experienced a new understanding of the work God was doing through Jesus.

While the law remained important... Paul...in this passage, is making a strong case for those newcomers to the faith by using the example of Abraham.

Would any who argued against Paul dare to say that the father of all the Jewish nation, Abraham, was not righteous before God? And yet, Abraham lived...before the law was given. So, no one could say that Abraham was made righteous by following the law.

What was it about Abraham that made him righteous before God? It was his faith.

-- Romans 4:18-22 says:

18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and...that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."

PAUSE

Now, like Abraham, there were those in Paul's own generation who were also made right before God by 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" (4:16). Here is the message God gives to us through Paul's words: What binds God's people together is not their culture, but it is the faith of Abraham. Abraham's children aren't just the Jews, they're all who believe in God's word through faith. We are Abraham's descendants, friends.

Paul draws a direct line between us and Abraham: Like Abraham, we also trust in God's promise of life even in the midst of death. But as Christians, the way the promise of God manifests itself for us is through the promise of the resurrection. God's promise that we cling to...is the promise of eternal life.

Short Pause

I have to be honest and admit that sometimes I over think things. Am I alone or does anyone else do that? I used to over complicate the truth and cause myself to have trouble wrapping my head around this whole idea of eternal life with God. I sure wanted to believe it, but for me that seemed to be the problem. I wanted to believe it so much that at one point I was afraid I might just be deluding myself.

I thought, could it be that I might have convinced myself that it's true just because I so deeply want it to be true. Maybe it's just something I choose to believe in because I couldn't bear to accept the truth that... that death really does have the last word for us.

Is hoping that we will all be together in heaven, with God and Jesus, the same as believing that I sing good enough to win American Idol?

Reading the theologian, Paul Tillich, has helped me sort through this a bit. He makes a distinction between a genuine hope and a foolish hope. Tillich says that "where there is genuine hope, that which we hope for is already present for us in some form. What we hope for is at the same time here...and not here. It has not yet been fulfilled and it may never be fulfilled. But it is present in the now, it has already begun. This beginning drives the hope into the future. If the hope is rooted in the reality of something already present, the fulfillment of that hope is possible. Maybe not certain, but possible. That...he says...is genuine hope. But where a beginning of what is hoped for is absent...hope is foolishness."

Doesn't that sound like something Saint Paul would say?

He also said that "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith."

To put that into some context...if you have a talent for singing, you might have a genuine hope of becoming the next American Idol, but if you are tone deaf and just can't sing a note to save your life...any hope of becoming the next American Idol is foolish hope.

pause

So...let's flesh that out a little more. Is trusting in the promise of eternal life a **foolish hope** or a **genuine hope** for us? As Tillich says, it's only genuine if the seeds of that promise are already present for us. If we are just longing for some pie-in-the-sky-after-we-die, our hope is foolish. So ask yourself...don't we see evidence of eternal life here and now? Aren't the seeds of God's promise already present for us?

When may we see a glimpse of eternal life? I believe when we experience an act of self-giving love, or a moment of absolute truth. We may feel the rush of sublime joy in the big and small ways in which we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives. How about when we experience a heart warmed by the love we share...and we know we are being the light of Christ in our world. How many of you have had someone you know has the gift of prayer... pray for you? When that happens...doesn't it increase your sense of hope?

I know that our lives go on into the eternal when I hear the kids laugh and cry during church service. When our youth come up to me...totally innocent and say, "I want to be baptized" ...my hope gets bolstered. Certainly, we feel the power of eternal life when we gather at the communion table and receive Christ's body and blood.

Our hope is genuine, because there is already a presence and a beginning of what we **hope for**. The more we realize that we are participating in eternal life right now, the deeper and more genuine our hope becomes.

SP

Like Abraham and Sarah, we live by faith. We trust in God's promises. That doesn't mean that we turn a blind eye to the facts. It doesn't mean we won't encounter setbacks in our lives. It doesn't mean that we won't struggle and go through dark times in our souls.

Just because we're people of faith...doesn't mean we won't have trials. The difference is that for people of faith, the promises of God are always there to ground us. Our faith tells us that there is more to life than all the stuff that bogs us down. Like Abraham, we find ourselves hoping against hope. Following God's lead. Our faith guides us as we follow Jesus in hopes of his gifts and promise.

So friends...as we journey the next few weeks toward the basis of our faith...the passion week of Christ's life altering gift for each one of us...we are not gathering and singing out of foolish Hope for a false idol... but we gather to repent, to reflect, and to a place our hope in Christ's promise of eternal life...even as we journey toward death.

To God be the glory, Amen.

Closing Prayer:

Gracious and faithful God,

You are the One who calls life out of death and brings into being things that are not. You were the God of Abraham and Sarah, strengthening them to hope *against all hope*—and You are our God still. Today we thank You for the reminder that genuine hope is not foolish dreaming but a response to Your promise already at work within us. You have planted the seeds of eternal life in our hearts, in our worship, in the laughter of children, in the love we share, and in the living presence of Christ among us.

Lord, when doubt rises, steady us.

When fear whispers, speak Your truth.

When the facts of life feel overwhelming, turn our eyes again toward Your faithfulness.

Make us a people who hold tightly to Your promises, even when the road is long and the evidence seems thin—because You, O Lord, are trustworthy.

And now, God, as an act of faith and gratitude, we dedicate our gifts to You.

Take our offerings—our time, our resources, our energy, and our lives—and use them to shine the light of genuine hope into a world hungry for something real. Multiply these gifts so that the ministries of this church may strengthen the weary, comfort the grieving, encourage the seeker, and proclaim Christ's life-giving promise to all.

Make us faithful stewards, bold witnesses, and humble servants, walking in the footsteps of Abraham...trusting, believing, and hoping in the One who keeps His word.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ—
the One delivered over to death for our sins

and raised to life for our justification.

Amen.

Benediction

Go now as children of Abraham...as sons and daughters of the promise.

May the God who gives life to the dead,
the Christ who walks with you in every season,
and the Spirit who plants eternal hope within you,
strengthen your faith, calm your doubts,
and fill your days with signs of the life that is already breaking forth.

Go in hope,
not foolish hope,
but the real and present hope that comes from the God
who has the power to do what He has promised.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit—
Go in peace.

Amen.

Next Steps:

- I will ask God to help strengthen me to hope against all hope
- I will read through the Lenten Reading List this Lenten season
- Sign me up for Growth Group: _____ (class code)