

Hoping Against Hope I Stand

✠ Solid on God's promises (vv.18-21)

✠ Credited with God's righteousness (vv.22-25)

In the name of Jesus, the fulfillment of all God's promises, dearly redeemed family of God:

As our nation gets ready for the 4th of July, Independence Day celebration, do you think some Americans think Samuel Adams was one of our presidents? A favorite beer is named "Samuel Adams," but that patriot brewer was a cousin of John Adams, our second president. Everyone knows George Washington was the first, but can you name the third President of these United States? He wrote the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain and is also carved in stone on Mount Rushmore, South Dakota. Yes, it's Thomas Jefferson, who died exactly the same day, within hours of his friend John Adams. Both Adams and Jefferson died on the 4th of July, 1776, plus fifty years, 1826. "Jefferson lives," said Adams. "Adams lives," said Jefferson. Each thought of the other in his last moments on earth.

Nations are born from promises, often in some kind of revolution when politicians and generals promise to improve the lives of citizens. Like politicians everywhere the promises of our early presidents were tested and often found inadequate. So voters elected someone else and tried again. Since kings and presidents and generals cannot even keep themselves alive, their power to deliver on promises is limited. In every age believers come to the Almighty God and say, **Hoping Against Hope I Stand...**

✠ Solid on God's promises (vv.18-21)

No one else makes promises like God, not nearly as many and certainly not as awesome. Every time you see a rainbow, you're looking at one of God's promises kept. Every baby born is another witness to the power and love of God's promises. You might say the whole Bible is a book of God's promises. And if you want to read a great summary of the Bible, you can't do better than this book called Romans. It's a letter which God the Holy Spirit inspired the Lord's Apostle Paul to write to Christians in Rome, both Jews and Gentiles. Martin Luther once said that if some vicious tyrant succeeded in destroying all the Bibles in the world and only this book of Romans and John's Gospel remained, Christianity would be saved. Get a grip on God's promises. Just underline them in John and Romans.

You know how fascinated I am as a student of human nature. I love to see the similarities and differences between cultures, like comparing American to Chinese culture. It's interesting how Americans and Chinese ask basically the same question about God. "If God does exist," they'll say, "how can God be all-powerful and all-loving? Wouldn't an all-powerful, all-loving God end suffering?"

We are convinced the Bible is God's Word and that suffering and death came into this world because of Adam's sin in the first Garden of Eden. But there's much we don't understand. Why do good people suffer like Job? Only God knows. That's one of the great lessons of Job and the rest of the Bible: God does not owe us an explanation. He is God. But He shows us how He feels about us by the promises He makes and the way He kept them to people like Abraham and Sarah who lived about the time of Job.

Why does Paul say this in Romans 4? *"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.'"* God was showing Abraham the stars when He said, *"So shall your offspring be."* It was many years after God had promised Abraham a son. Wealthy with servants, flocks and herds, Abraham had wandered the

¹ The words of the theme are familiar to all of us who used *TLH – The Lutheran Hymnal*. They come from Charles Wesley's popular hymn: "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" – *TLH* 345:3, which is a stanza not included in *CW* 357. [M.C. 6/24/2011]

land of Canaan. Recently he had rescued Lot by force from four powerful kings. Still no son, as he and his wife Sarah kept getting older. By now Abraham was about 85 and Sarah 75, well past the age of having babies. Yet God is pointing at the night sky and promising descendants as countless as the stars.

Could you **Stand Solid on God's promises**? Or would you ask, "Does God have the power and the love?" Abraham did not doubt. "*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. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*" It took another fifteen years until Abraham was 100, Sarah 90, but they had a son named Isaac – *joyful laughter*.

What keeps you up at night? What makes you anxious and afraid? What's the one thing in your life you'd change if you could? Have you been praying long and hard, yet nothing seems to change? Does it feel as if God has forgotten you? You don't want to doubt the power of God Almighty. You don't want to question His wisdom and love. That's why we need to see the way God blessed ancient believers like Abraham and Sarah. They could say, **Hoping Against Hope I Stand – Solid on God's promises**. But God wants you to have that same faith, to be like the house built on the rock to withstand all storms. So now in God's Word of promise the Lord's Apostle brings it home to your heart.

✠ **Credited with God's righteousness (vv.22-25)**

Wouldn't it be great if every time you checked your bank balance, it was bigger? Before the days of electronic banking, we used to use books called "ledgers." You'd add up the "debits" (spending) in one column and the "assets" (income) in another. Add and subtract from the old balance, and there's the "bottom line." Funny how the spending still seems to outrun the income. But not in God's book.

If God kept a record of all our evil thoughts, words and deeds, along with all the good things we failed to say and do – our debt to God would be enormous. Money won't pay it down. Only blood will do. As God says, "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*" (Hebrews 9:22) Only one place to pay that debt if we had to pay ourselves. Hell holds only prisoners, and no one ever escapes. As pictured in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the sign above hell's entrance well could read: "Abandon hope, all you who enter here!" No payment is ever enough for mortals to appease the wrath of Almighty God.

And God knew it. He who is Almighty is also all-loving. So here's what God did. He took your ledger to a garden called Gethsemane. And there God's own Son began to wash your debt away with His bloody sweat and tears. He paid the full measure of pain and anguish of soul on a cross nearby. And with His holy, precious blood He deleted every sin from your debit column. But He did not stop there. He raised Jesus from the dead because He had also filled your assets column full with righteousness and holiness from Jesus' perfect life. Here's your ledger now in Christ: debts = 0; assets = everything perfect, holy and good. That's why the last verse of our text says literally, "*He was delivered over to death because of our sins and was raised to life because of our justification.*" The divine Judge ruled when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And God's ruling is the same for all: "Not guilty!"

Is this verdict yours? Do you accept it for yourself? Whenever you hear this Good News, God is knocking at your heart's door. "*The words 'it was credited to him' were written not only for Abraham, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.*" Every time you open the Bible it's as if God's Prize Patrol pulled up to your front door. Here's a check for unbounded goodness and grace and life everlasting! Faith is made alive when the Good New guys arrive. Faith takes that check to the bank and cashes it. Faith lives on the proceeds from God, debt-free! Faith is **Credited with God's righteousness. Hoping Against Hope I Stand.**

Be like the little boy who ran to his mother with an "owie." Sometimes you can see it, sometimes not. "It hurts!" says your heart to God. "Here, I'll make it better," says your heavenly Father. "My promises bring you home to my garden Paradise of heaven. In Jesus all my promises come true." Amen.

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New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126