

Romans 8:24-25, 31-39  
"The Source of Hope"  
July 31, 2011 Maple Grove UMC

We've come to the final leg of our four-part series on hope. We talked about a future with hope. We learned the necessity of investing in hope. We know that it's hard to get to hope, but that hope will never let you down. Now turn to someone sitting near you and tell each other: **the source of hope is the promise of God.** Now turn to someone on another side of you and say it again: **the source of hope is the promise of God.** And now you know what this final message of hope will be: **the source of hope is the promise of God.**

At its best, life is lived in the making and keeping of promises. My Granddad worked in the booming oilfields in Oklahoma and Kansas in the 1920s. Life was good. He got married and started a family. Then came the Great Depression. No one had work. No one had any money. Granddad didn't even have food for his kids. He finally found an oil driller who agreed to let him come to work, but he told him, "Now, I won't be able to pay you anything for probably six months. But I promise that when I get paid, you'll get paid." And

every week Grandma went to the store, picked out her groceries and told the store owner, “Put it on my tab. My husband is working for John Potts. And I promise that when we get paid, you’ll get paid.” This went on for over six months, and eventually everybody got paid. Life was lived in the making and keeping of promises.

When a couple gets married, the pastor does not ask, “John, *do* you love Susan?” Of course he does love her—they’re getting married. No, what the pastor asks is, “John, *will* you love Susan?” Love, it turns out, is not so much a feeling as a promise. Wendell Berry has written that adultery and divorce are often seen as problems of sexuality or compatibility, but in essence, he says, they’re really matters of “word-breaking.” When it works, marriage is lived in the making and keeping of a promise. That, of course, is also why it is so terribly painful and destructive when it doesn’t work.

Story: *Love You Forever*, by Robert Munsch

At its best, life is lived with the making and keeping of promises.

Now, I think we all know that life is not always at its best. Not every child has a mother who makes and keeps the promise of love like we read about in the story, and not every mother has a child like that either. Sadly, we live among both promise making and promise breaking. And even more sadly, we all participate in both promise making and promise breaking. For many of us, the central pains of our lives have to do with promises broken—broken to us and broken by us.

But here, when it comes to promises, is the difference between human beings and God. While people are both promise keepers and promise breakers, God is only a promise keeper. What God has spoken or caused to be written in scripture, God will do. Maybe not in the way you expected, maybe not in the time-frame you wanted, but unlike human beings, God will always come through. Though our loved fails, God's love remains steadfast. And that's why the promise of God is the source of hope.

To the people in exile in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah wrote, "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping." He acknowledges the brokenness and pain, but goes on to say, "They

shall come back from the land of the enemy, says the Lord, there is hope for your future, says the Lord, your children shall come back to their own country.” **The source of hope is the promise of God.**

To the Christians in Rome the apostle Paul wrote, “For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with hope.” He concludes, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now that’s a promise! Whatever you do—God still loves you in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whatever may be done to you--God still loves you in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whatever happened a long time ago, and no matter what may happen in the future--God still loves you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If you lose your job, if you lose your spouse, if you screw up big time, if it seems like there’s no way to go on, if you keel over and die--God still loves you in Christ Jesus our Lord. I can live a long time—in fact, I will live forever—in that promise. **The source of hope is the promise of God.**

The scriptures, of course, are filled with such promises. From start to finish, the Bible acknowledges that life can be hard and full of pain, but **the source of hope is the promise of God.**

- God promised Noah, “never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 9:11), and to this day the sign of that promise is the rainbow.
- God promised Abraham numerous descendants and a holy land, and through miracles of history Jewish people live out those promises today (Genesis 15:18-21,17:2).
- The Lord came to Moses in a burning bush and promised, “I am the Lord, and I will . . . deliver you from slavery” (Exodus 6:6). And so it was.
- After Jesus rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit descended and Peter repeated the promise of the prophet Joel that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).
- Jesus promised his eternal presence with his people, saying, “For wherever two or three are gathering in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). And the

last thing he said on earth was: “And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The Christian life is lived in the promises of Christ. The source of hope is the promise of God.

The 2003 movie *Big Fish* tells the story of a witch who, legend has it, if you ever gaze into her eyes you will be carried into the future and see your dying day, the time and manner of your death. Three little boys venture close to the witch’s house. Suddenly she appears in the doorway, glaring at them. And sure enough, all of the boys are transfixed and, looking into the witch’s wild eye, they see pictures of their own deaths.

For two of the boys, these pictures of their future deaths are terrifying. However, the third boy, who eventually becomes the hero of the story, has a different experience. When he looks into the witch’s eyes, his face lights up with delight. “So,” he exclaims, “*that’s* how it ends!” For the rest of the movie he is fearless and confident in the face of every trouble. No matter what kind of distress happens to him, no matter what crisis enters his life, he is unshaken. He has seen the future, and he knows. “This isn’t how it ends,” he says.<sup>1</sup>

Well, we too have a picture of how things turn out—not in a witch’s eye, but in the holy scriptures, in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, in the promises of God. You too can be confident in the face of every trouble, hopeful no matter what distress comes your way, because you know, “This isn’t how it ends.” It ends with exiles coming home at last. It ends in the presence of Jesus Christ. It ends with nothing, absolutely nothing, ever separating us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Once again, for safe keeping: **the promise of God is the source of hope.** Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas G. Long, “Preaching Romans Today,” *Interpretation* (58/3, July 2004), 273-74.