

Faith in Spite of Unfulfilled Promises

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Hebrews chapter 11, focusing on the faith of various biblical figures like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It emphasizes the importance of continuing to believe in God's promises even when they are not immediately fulfilled, contrasting true faith with the modern misconception that faith guarantees immediate results. The message urges believers to prioritize eternal heavenly promises over temporary earthly desires, highlighting the need to live as strangers and pilgrims on earth while seeking a homeland in heaven. Ultimately, it calls for unwavering faith in God's promises despite challenges and the prevailing worldly mindset.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:13, Genesis 26:24, Matthew 6:19, 1 Peter 2:11, John 8:56, Genesis 19:26, Isaiah 65:17, Matthew 16:18

Topics: "Faith in God's Promises", "Living as Pilgrims on Earth"

Description

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Transcript

Hebrews chapter 11, as we continue to study through the book of Hebrews, and we've been in Hebrews 11 for a few weeks, and we'll still be here another few weeks, let's read from verse 13 through 22. So Hebrews chapter 11, reading from 13 through 22, Hebrews 11, 13, These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

And truly if they had called in mind the country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, In Isaac your seed shall be called, concluding that God was

able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob, and he saw concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave construction concerning his bones. So we come to verse 13, and he has now mentioned a few examples of faith. He's going to mention some more as we go on.

He's spoken of Abel, he's spoken of Enoch, he spoke about Noah, Abraham, and Sarah. So not just those, so when he says these all, he's not just referring those that he has already mentioned, but also those that are coming, that he's going to speak about in the next few sentences. Now he says they all died in faith.

In other words, they died without giving up faith, without moving into unbelief. The problem we have is that when our faith is not answered, when things don't happen that we believe, we give up hope, and we say, well, it's not going to happen, and we stop believing. Now this is at two different levels.

The first level, obviously, is concerning our salvation. That is what he is addressing with the people that he is writing to, these Jewish believers. Many of them were turning away from the faith, going back to Judaism.

And he is saying, these people didn't give up. You need to continue to believe to the end. So it applies to salvation, but it also applies to things that we believe God for, the promises.

So he says, not having received the promises. So we may have certain promises from God. Those may be general promises that we find from the Word of God that apply to us as Christians or to the church, or there may be specific promises that we feel that God has made to us personally or individually.

And those promises don't seem to come to fruition. They don't seem to be happening, and it's been a long time, and we say, well, God, why are you not answering our prayers? And we give up in believing God. So he is saying, these all died, but they continued to believe even to the point of death and in death.

Now it's easy to believe when things happen, when our prayers are being answered, when things are happening in our lives. And we say, well, that's great. You know, I'm believing God.

God is blessing me, and God is helping me, and everything is working out. It's great. It's another thing to believe in spite of God not answering our prayers.

And that's where the problem comes. Now he says, they died in faith not having received the promises. So in spite of them not seeing the fulfillment of the promises that God had made to them, they continued to believe.

And of course, the point he is making is that we should not give up and stop believing. We should continue believing in spite of the evidence, in spite of whether the promises are being fulfilled or are not being fulfilled. But now there's another aspect to this first phrase.

He says, they died in faith not having received the promises. Now we've been highlighting the problems with the modern teachings on faith. The modern teachings of faith says that if you believe, you will get what you believe for.

And so we have a saying, grab it, blab it and grab it, or name it and claim it. And so if you believe, then God's got to do what you believe him for. If you don't get what you believe for, whether it's healing or whether it's financial blessing or whether it's spiritual blessing, it doesn't matter, if it doesn't happen, it's because you didn't exercise enough faith.

Because according to that teaching, whatever you believe, you can achieve. Whatever you set your mind to, God has to do what you tell him to do. God becomes subject to us.

And of course, that's another major heresy, because we know that God is sovereign. We cannot tell God what to do. God does what God chooses to do.

But according to that teaching, and remember that this is the teaching that the vast majority of modern Christians hold to, even though they may not be in what we call the Word of Faith doctrine or the Prosperity doctrine, these doctrines have infiltrated Christian thinking across the spectrum, even in evangelical and in Reformed circles. And so there's elements of this going right through. And so you must get what you believe.

If you don't get, if you're poor, or you're not physically well, you're sick, or things don't go well in your life, it's because you haven't exercised faith. But according to that statement, these men that the writer is speaking about were failures, because they didn't exercise enough faith to get what they were believing God for. And yet the Scripture contradicts that, and it says, no, they were great men of faith.

They were the heroes of faith, because even though they didn't get what they believed for in their lifetime, I'm going to come back to that, they still believed. You see, again, faith is not about the results that our faith produces. Faith is an end in itself.

To many of us, faith is a means to an end. So if I have faith, then I can get certain things. And it's not about the faith, it's about the stuff I get, whether it's healing or financial stuff, or spiritual stuff, or whatever it may be.

No, faith is an end in itself. We believe God, and that is what pleases God. Without faith, remember right in the beginning of the chapter, it is impossible to believe God.

We believe because that pleases God, that we trust him. I think we've all had the experience of people who do not trust us, or who withdraw their confidence in us. It's a very painful experience.

And it may be warranted because we are human and we fail. We may fail our children, and they begin to wonder whether we're trustworthy, whether we're reliable. We may fail our spouses.

We may fail one another. And so sometimes that doubt, or that mistrust, if you will, is justified. But God is trustworthy.

God is reliable, he is dependable, he is faithful. And so when we lose trust or confidence in God, it's not because God has done or not done something that resulted in us not believing, it's because we have stopped believing. So it's on us.

And it's an insult to a faithful, great, glorious, wonderful God to say, God, I cannot trust you. There are Christians after me serving them for many years who do not trust me. It's a great insult.

I know how it feels. And yet God is far more perfect than I could ever begin to hope to be. And yet we don't trust him.

He's proven himself to us year after year, decade after decade, century after century. From the beginning of time to now, God has never failed. And yet somehow we come to a place where we say, well, I don't know that I can trust God.

And we cover it by saying, well, you know, I'm just weak. My faith isn't so strong. No, it's a terrible thing to say to a God who has proven through eternity his dependability, his faithfulness, to say we don't trust him.

Even when things don't happen the way we want them to happen. And these men trusted God in spite of the lack of evidence, in spite of the fact that things didn't happen the way they wanted to see them happen. And I'm going to speak about that in a few moments.

But notice it says, having seen them afar off. So the promises that they saw, that they believed, was afar off. You see, again, we live in a time, we live in a society where it's instant gratification.

As we saw in the testimony of our brother in the presentation. He went to the store, he couldn't get what he wanted, and he was unhappy. I praise God that he repented of that, because most of us don't.

Because we expect to go to Amazon, hit the button, get what we want, and if it doesn't arrive tomorrow, and I know what I speak of, we're upset. But they saw the promises afar off. Now, we spoke about Abraham last week.

How far off were the promises that he saw? Because remember, he is the father of faith, he is the prime example of faith. So, we've gone to him, we're going to go back to him again next week as the next verses go back to Abraham. Well, remember that one of the promises was this city.

We're going to see that in the next few verses again. It's going to come back to this idea of a country or a homeland. He saw a city.

And remember, we said that that city was 5,000 years in the future. 5,000 years in the future. And he said, that's the promise.

And I'm not going to turn back to where I came from. I'm not going to build an alternative city. I'm going to wait for the promise of God.

But remember that God gave him another promise. And the other promise was that he would be a great nation. And Abraham died.

So, Abraham dies living in a tent. No city. Abraham dies and he sees the beginning of the promise of a nation.

But he only has one boy, Isaac. And yet he continues to believe God. He never saw the fulfillment of his descendants being as the stars of the heaven and as the sand of the sea.

But there was another promise. And that was that in his seed, his descendant, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And we know that Hebrews is very clear as to what that is.

It's not in the Jews that the world is blessed. But it's in Jesus. Because the book of Hebrews says it's not in seeds, as in many, but in seed, as in one.

So, what did Abraham see in that blessing? How far off was that blessing? In your seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Well, John 8 tells us, verse 56. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day.

Who's speaking? Jesus. So, what's he saying? He's saying, Abraham saw my day. Saw me come.

And he was glad. He rejoiced and he was glad. So, Abraham sees, Abraham lived 2,000 years, almost exactly before Christ came.

So, Abraham sees 2,000 years in the future. And he sees the Messiah. And he says, those are the promises.

And he died holding on to those promises. Holding on to the promises of a land and a city. On the promise of a great nation coming forth from him.

Of a promise of a Messiah who would bless the world. He never saw those things, but he held on to them. Now, it says then, having seen them afar off.

And we're going to speak about Moses in a few weeks time. You're going to see the same thing with Moses. This was something common to all of them.

But having seen them afar off, were assured of them. And embraced them. The problem we have today, and the problem has been with the church from the beginning.

And it's that we want to embrace things that we can see and handle and touch. We embrace material things. We embrace political power.

We embrace influence and control. Things that we can get now. Those are the things that we hold on to.

And yet it says that these men held on to eternal things. And we've spoken many times in the past about the problem of being short-sighted. And we just see the here and now.

This is all that's important. Just this month, this year. Christmas is coming.

My paycheck, whatever it is. These are the things that we cling to. These are the things we hold on to.

And the problem is you can't hold on to temporal things and eternal things at the same time. You have to let go of the temporal if you're going to hold on to the eternal. And these men didn't hold on to the temporal.

Remember Abraham again. He leaves his city. And he goes and lives in a tent.

He lets go of that. He doesn't build a city for himself. Because he sees the promise of God and he embraces that.

He holds on to that and he clings on to that. And folk, I'm deeply concerned that there are so few Christians today in the world and in the church that are clinging to eternal things. Clinging to heaven.

Clinging to the promises of Jesus coming again. Clinging to the promises of a new Jerusalem. And of a righteous and a just society as he rules and reigns from Jerusalem.

Those are the things that we ought to be clinging to. Those are the things that we should be embracing. And yet we embrace everything else.

And even though we may not physically embrace them, we embrace them with our hearts and with our thoughts. And I spoke to you, was it last week or the week before, I reminded you of that second shortest verse in the Bible. You should know by now what that verse is.

Remember Lot's wife. Remember Lot's wife. A very important verse.

And you remember what the problem was. She had embraced her life in Sodom and Gomorrah. And in spite of the fact that it was under God's judgment, and God had destroyed and determined destruction and judgment on those cities, her heart was still there.

And even though the Lord sent angels and they physically removed her from the city, they couldn't deal with her heart. And she looks back. And I think that he has this in mind because he tells us in the next couple of verses, he speaks about looking back.

Where is our heart? Jesus says where your treasure is. That's where your heart will be. It's your treasure in this world, in this earth, in the things of this world.

It's your treasure in heaven. Because that will determine what you embrace. That will determine where your heart's going to be.

And where your heart is, is going to determine the way that you live. And you can see this here because he says they saw them afar off. They were assured of them.

They embraced them. And they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on this earth. You see, what they embraced determined their confession.

And when we're speaking about a confession here, we're not talking about a verbal confession. We're speaking about a confession by the way that they lived their lives. How do we know that Abraham had embraced the promise of a city? Because he lived in a tent.

And he said, I'm not going to compromise on that. I'm waiting for God's fulfillment. And so when we have our eyes set on heaven, it changes the way that we live.

In 1 Peter chapter 1, Peter begins and he says, An apostle of Jesus Christ to the pilgrims of the dispersion, in Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. To the pilgrims. Same word that we find if we go back to verse 13.

Pilgrims on the earth. And so Peter writes, and he's writing to Christians, and he says, you are pilgrims. And verse 17, I think, verse 11 of chapter 2, Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

And so the whole of the first letter of Peter, and it wasn't so long ago that we did 1 Peter. You remember that the whole of 1 Peter revolves around this idea that because we are pilgrims passing through, we are strangers, we are sojourners, we don't belong here, our citizenship is in heaven. Because that is true, it

affects the way that we live.

If you are invested in this world, you're going to live in a certain way. If you're invested in heaven, you're going to live differently. And so how do we know then that the majority of Christians, we go back to verse 13, that the majority of Christians are confessing that they are not strangers and pilgrims by the way they live, by the way they handle money, by the way they use their time, by the things that they spend their time thinking about, by the things that they spend working on, material things rather than spiritual things.

And so what are we confessing? We're confessing we are citizens here, not citizens up there. I've spoken to you before about Christian nationalism. It's a plague that has come upon the church all over the world.

And churches and preachers and Christians are spending their time trying to build a better kingdom here, a better world here. And what they're declaring by their preaching and what they're declaring by their writing and by their living is we don't believe the promises of God of a new heaven and a new earth. We have to get it for ourselves here now.

We have to change society, we have to change the country so that we can have heaven here on earth. Abraham didn't do that. He said, I'm waiting for God's promise.

And until that day, I'm going to live as a stranger and as a pilgrim. I don't belong. Now, folks, unfortunately the majority of Christians today belong in this world.

They're comfortable here. They speak its language. They embrace its values.

They embrace its cultures. Because this is their life. Folks, if we are Christians, like the Christians in the book of Hebrews, we will be misfits in this world because we don't belong.

We will have difficulty understanding the language, the culture, the values, the things of this world because we are citizens of another country. And so they embrace them. They confess that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth.

Verse 14, For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. Now, I spoke to you last week about the fact that I guess half of the world wants to come to America. And those who don't want to come to America want to go to England or Europe.

Looking for a better life. And I'm not making a political statement. Because the problem is a good percentage of Americans are looking for somewhere else.

Where life can be better. I guess about half of California are looking to Texas and Arizona and saying, well, life's better out there. You buy a house for half the price and the politics are different and it's better out there.

We're never satisfied. We're always looking for that ideal utopia, that ideal place where everything is great, where there's no crime, where the politics is in line with what I believe, where there's justice, where there's righteousness, where everything's great, everything's wonderful. But we're wasting our time.

Because you're not going to find it here. There is no utopia in this world. And you can go from one country to the other and you'll never find what you're looking for.

Because God has placed heaven in our hearts. He has placed a desire for the perfect in our hearts. And it's not so that we would find the perfect here, but so that we may come to understand the perfect is not here, but the perfect is in heaven.

And that that's where we're headed. And that's the homeland that we're looking for. Remember the idea of a homeland is where I'm at home.

And as I said a few minutes ago, the problem is that we're just at home here. When I should never feel at home here, because I'm looking for the place where I really belong. And where I really belong is in the presence of my Savior.

Verse 15, And truly if they'd called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. Now I think that the writer has Lot's wife in mind, who looked back and called to mind what she had just come out of. But I believe he's directly addressing the Hebrew believers in this group who were looking back at Judaism and saying, we didn't have so much persecution back there.

Our friends and our family accepted us when we were practicing Jews. Now our family are against us, our religion is against us, the Roman government is against us because we're Christians. And many of them were turning back.

And some that he is still writing to are thinking about going back. And he's saying, remember Abraham. Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees, a well-developed city.

And he lived in a tent. And he's by inference saying, Abraham never looked back. You see, because Abraham began to doubt God's promises and said, well, God has not fulfilled His promise.

Remember, he lived 75 years in a tent. And maybe after 60 years he would say, well, where's the promise? He could have said, I remember what it was like in Ur. We had proper houses, built out of stone with leak-proof roofs.

We had running water. We had a library. We had a gymnasium, two gymnasiums actually.

We had all these things. My family's there. My friends are there.

Let me go back. He says, if they'd called to mind the country from which they'd come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But he also has a third picture in mind.

And I trust that you've made that connection already. God brings Israel to the promised land. And they say, no, we want to go back to Egypt.

We remember the leeks and the garlics and the onions and the cucumber and the fish and the stuff that we had in Egypt. We're tired of this manor. Remember the manor was, the book of Psalms says, angels' food and bread from heaven.

So we're tired of heavenly stuff. We want the earthly stuff. Remember all those things they were looking for, the leeks, the garlics, the onions, the cucumbers, lemons, they all grow in the ground or on the ground.

God's taking them to a land of milk and honey where things come from above. The rain came from above, unlike Egypt where the rain came from below. A land of grapes and figs and olives that grow above, rather than the things that grow on the ground.

They say, no, we're tired of these heavenly things. We want the earthly things again. No wonder God rejects them.

And remember it's in the book of Hebrews, chapter 3, that he speaks about that. And he's still bearing, keeping that in mind, and he's telling us, don't be like Israel, be like Abraham. Don't be like those who want to go back.

Be like Abraham and like the other heroes of faith who moved ahead and moved forward to the promises of God. Verse 16, But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. A heavenly country.

What are we looking for? Where is our home? Where is our hope? Is it here on earth? I'm deeply concerned about the number of Christians who just cannot wait for the next election. I'm not meaning necessarily the 24th election. This is a perpetual problem.

Just waiting for the next election because things will change. Things are going to be great. We're going to get our guy back in the White House and then things will be great.

It goes both sides. And if you're old enough, you'll know that we've gone through this process decade after decade, hundreds of years. It never gets better, it gets worse.

When will we learn to stop putting our confidence in men and in this world, put our confidence in Jesus? Then he says, Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. God is not ashamed to be called their God. Now notice, he doesn't say that they were not ashamed to call God their God, but God was not ashamed to be called their God.

You see, it's one thing to say, well, he's my God. But is he acknowledging us and saying, these are my people? You see, because if we don't live like him, he's not going to own us. He's not going to say, these are my people.

Look how they live. They're materialistic. They're politically minded.

They're earthly minded. They're chasing the stuff of this world. Is God going to say, these are my people? Now, when did God call them their God? Genesis chapter 26, verse 24, and there are many other verses in the Old Testament, and the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, I am the God of your father Abraham.

Do not fear. In other verses, God speaks and he reveals himself, says, I'm the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. Now, probably the vast majority of us here this morning and those who are watching online say, well, he's my God.

Well, that's not the question. The question is, does he acknowledge you and say, he's my son. He is my people.

I am their God. And you remember the father's acknowledgement of his son. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

We lay so much emphasis in evangelical Christianity on the fact that I need to know God. I need to know Jesus. Well, that's only one part of the story.

And the problem is that so many people claim and say, I know Jesus. I know God. I pray our father, which art in heaven.

That's not the question. The question is, does he know you? Does he acknowledge you? Does he say, this is my son? I'm pleased with him. How do we please God? We go back to the beginning of the chapter.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. And when we cannot believe God in spite of problems and difficulties and unfulfilled promises, can we really say he is proud of us? But God honored these men, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the other heroes of faith, because they trusted him in spite of the fact that the promises were not fulfilled in their time. Now, you may have certain promises that you feel that God has made to you personally.

We have certain promises in his word. Are we clinging to those promises and say, well, I don't see how it's going to work out? I've spoken to you many times about the falling away that we find happening in the church today. And it's not just a numerical falling away.

It's a spiritual falling away. And there are many days that I despair. And I say, God, what's happening to the church? Not just this church, but the church in general.

Will there still be a church if Jesus doesn't come? Will there still be a church in ten years' time? And, folks, from a human point of view, the answer is no. Because the rate at which the falling away is happening, the rate at which even those who are born again Christians are buying into this world and investing in this world and are forsaking God is unprecedented. New people are not getting saved.

I don't understand why. And we say, well, maybe the gospel is not true. No, the gospel is true.

And Jesus gave us his word. And this is something I cling to every day of my life. And he said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And in spite of every evidence that we see around us, I'm clinging to God's promise that he will present to himself a glorious bride without spot and without blemish. And while we look at the church today, and I'm meaning the church worldwide, we're seeing something that is fractured, that is divided, and that is constantly dividing. When people are falling into error, falling into materialism and worldliness and lukewarmness, and the list goes on and on and on.

And we say, what's going to happen? I'm clinging to his promise. I'm going to build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And we cannot afford to lose faith in God's promise.

Unfortunately, many of us are being encouraged to be motivated by the promises of a false revival. There is no promise of a revival. But there is a promise of survival.

And that's where we are at at the moment. The church is in survival mode. Christians are in survival mode.

And unfortunately, many are doing exactly what the writer is saying to the Hebrews. They're looking back at where they came from, and they're turning away. Can we fix our eyes on the promises of God? Can we fix our eyes on Jesus' coming? Can we fix our eyes on the promise of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells? And can we embrace those things and live as those who are indeed strangers and pilgrims in the earth? Father, we pray that you would write these things upon our hearts, Lord.

We talk about them, and yet somehow when we leave here and we get back into the world, it's all gone. And we begin to live again like the rest of the world lives. Lord, I pray that you would inscribe heaven upon our hearts.

Lord, that there would be just one thing that we desire, and that is the presence of the Lord Jesus. That we may stand around that throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. Lord, I cannot do this as a preacher.

I cannot motivate people. I cannot change hearts. I cannot change minds.

But you can. And I pray, Lord, that you would create within each one of us a new desire for the things of heaven, for the promises of God. And Lord, that we would walk by faith.

And even though it looks like the church is falling apart around the world, and even though, Lord, it looks like nothing is happening, help us, Lord, to cling to your promises. Lord, those personal promises that we feel that you've made to us individually. Lord, as we struggle to live our Christian lives, and somehow things are just not coming together for us in our spiritual walk, help us, Lord, to keep our eyes fixed on you, fixed on the promises, and to not waver for one moment, but to believe you to the very end.

We pray that as the disciples said, Lord, help our weak faith. Help us, Lord, to endure to the end. I ask this in Jesus' name.

Pray that you would go with us, keep us, protect us, bring us together again safely on Thursday, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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