

Promises....Promises....
Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

The writer of Hebrews is talking about faith and he uses Abraham as the example to look towards. Abraham as you know is called by God to leave his father and family, his home, and everything he knows to travel roughly a thousand miles to a place he's never seen before. This, says God, will be Abraham's new home; it will be his Promised Land, where his descendants will live and prosper. Right! Now let's get this straight a fatherless seventy five year old is told to leave home and everything he knows to go to land that he has never seen, in a place he has never been, to live and have children and children's children with Sarah when they are both way past the children bearing years. RIGHT!!!

God speaks and Abraham packs and leaves by faith. That's faith. That is having faith in an assurance of things hoped for, and having conviction in things not yet seen. Abraham trusted and had an assurance in God's word and he knew that one day what God has said will come true. That's faith.

But faith of Abraham isn't just that simple, the story doesn't end there. Abraham arrives in Canaan, faithfully believing that this land is a gift from God to him and to his descendants. This, too, is a matter of faith, God knows the plan, Abraham knows the plan, but the people of Canaan haven't heard this yet. It is not like Canaan is sitting there empty with a FOR SALE sign hanging out in the front yard. It was a vast land of cities and regions governed by many different rulers and kings. But the Lord said this is Abraham's land. Right!!! This man who lives the city life of Haran, moves with his wife, nephew, and his servants and herds goes to a land to live as a nomad without home believing that this land will be his. For that matter, Abraham, and his eventual son Isaac and his son Jacob and the twelve sons of Jacob never build homes, they live in tents as nomads, traveling with herds. The first building this family will build and live in is in Egypt as slaves for 440 years, before they come back as a great nation and conquer the land. But here in the promised Land, 600 year before all that, Abraham has an assurance of things hoped for and a conviction that what he can't see will one day come to pass. Abraham will never see the conquering of the land under Joshua, or the reign of the first king, Saul or the establishment of the capital in Jerusalem by King David, or the magnificence of the temple built on Zion by King Solomon. He would not be aware of the splitting of the country the years of wars and peace against the Assyrians, Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans. He would not

know the destruction of Judah and the temple in 70 A.D. by the Roman legions. He would have never known that over 3,500 years after he follows God that a league of nations would establish a country in 1948 A.D. and call it Israel. Abraham could have never seen any of these things coming to pass, but he believed in things not seen and had the assurance in that hope from God. That is faith.

Now don't forget Abraham wasn't alone however. Let's consider a bit about Sarah. At the age of Sixty-five years old, this woman is told by her husband that he has talked with God. And that God has asked him to take her and all they have and move to a new land that he has never been to before and doesn't know. Imagine her response, Right!!! Imagine this same sixty-five year old, who has no kids, listening to her husband tell her they are moving there because God wants them to raise their kids in this land that will be theirs one day. Now jump ahead a few years and imagine this same woman now eighty-nine years old who is still childless, and everyone knows its now her fault because Abraham has had a son to the servant girl Hagar. Under this shame and what some in that day would say was a curse, Sarah now is told once again by her loving 99 year old husband that God said she will bear a son. And even later three strangers walking on the road to Sodom, predict that in due season she will bear a son. 89, her husband 99, on the words of a stranger, bear a son, Right!!!

But God spoke and what he speaks comes to pass. In due time, before a year has passed Sarah is cradling young Isaac in her arms. That which was unseen has come to be and they are assured in what they had conviction to hope for their entire lives. Now that is faith.

And this assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen continues. The miracle will continue: the family line of Abraham and Isaac will weave throughout the Old Testament, sometimes faithful to God and sometimes not. From Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to the twelve tribes, eventually even down to a child who comes in an unlikely conception and birth: he will be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. By his life, death, and resurrection. He will redeem the world and save his people. All who believe in him will live by faith. Faith like Abraham to have faith in the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.

Now consider your faith. Could you do that? Could you believe and have faith as Abraham and Sarah did? To pick up and move, to leave everything that you know, to put it all on the line and never quite see the end result fully, just believing that it will come to be and trusting in the promise of things hoped for? Could you do that?

Soren Keirkegard talked about the human capacity to have faith in a story he called the Church of Duckland. You see there was a small village of ducks, and in this community where

duck homes where they lived, and duck businesses where they worked and duck diners where they ate and even a duck church where they went to worship. Yes, that's right these duck every Sunday morning would waddle down the street and waddling right into church. And then the duck organist would play and they would sing and the duck preacher would get up and read from duckland scripture quoting that God had made them and they are his. That by God's gift they are creatures loved and cherished, that they can lift up and soar and fly and never fall because God is with them. And the ducks would feel the comfort of those inspiration words and believe and sing louder and say Amen with passion. And then services would end and the ducks would waddle back out down the street waddling to their homes, businesses and diners.

Think about it for a moment, the point may sneak up on you. They waddled in and they waddled out and they all heard the sermon message that said God willed them to lift up and soar, to fly and not fall. And all they do is say Amen, and waddle on about their lives.

To hear the words of faith and say amen is one thing, but to live fully trusting 100% in the faith that is a totally different matter. To believe in things unseen to have conviction and assurance in things hoped for is totally different then just simply going through the motions of saying that you have faith.

The promises of God are many, and they are good. The Lord promises that he works all things for the good of those who love him. The Lord promises that the Son of Man with healing in his wings, guarantees us salvation. The Lord promises strength over temptation. The Lord promises that he has overcome the world, and that he is the King of kings and Lord of lords, now and for all generations, without end. He promises that he is the resurrection and the life everlasting. These promises are the word of God. They are sure, and they are yours. Certain, guaranteed. No doubt about it. You can trust in that. God has made the promise.

The problem is we are like the ducks and we think it sounds wonderful, but we just are not sure if we want to trust in it that much, we hear of salvation and the kingdom of God but we can't see the fulfillment of this promise here and now. We hear God's command telling each one of us to evangelize to all the world teaching them about God and yet we don't have the conviction to fulfill this. Our sinful nature whispers to us that it can't be true, that we can't do it, that it can't be done, and so we waddle on home feeling we were faithful.

True faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. We are to live like Abraham, trusting that the Word is true despite all outward appearances. WE are to live like Sarah hoping in that promise against all odds. May you hold on to the Gospel message that Jesus came into this world to offer his life for each of us, to die on the cross, to be resurrected and ascended to the Father, to free us from death and make us his own now

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and forever. Have the hope in this promise, have the conviction to soar. May that true faith lift you up this day. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.