

Theme: FAITH TAKES HOLD OF GOD'S PROMISES

- I. Faith finds fulfillment. (v. 1)
- II. Faith finds favor. (v. 2)
- III. Faith flows from the Word. (v. 3)
- IV. Faith looks forward to our future fatherland. (v. 8-16)

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Heirs of heaven,

He did it multiple times in different ways: on a bicycle, blindfolded, on stilts, with a stove he used to cook an omelet. Charles Blondin walked across an 11,000 foot tightrope suspended 150 feet over Niagara Falls. He crossed with a wheelbarrow full of potatoes. When he arrived on the other side, he asked the crowds, “Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?” The crowd praised him as the greatest tightrope walker in the world. They believed he could carry someone across. But when Blondin asked for a volunteer, no one budged.

Your faith is only as strong as its object. If your faith is in a tightrope walker, it's only as good as that individual's skills. No matter how sincerely you believe your two-year-old can drive you home, a child is not ready to operate a vehicle. If you believe in science or human reason, you're limited by what

people can do. We believe in God and his Word. Our faith gives us hope in life, and a home in heaven after. That's God's promise. **FAITH TAKES HOLD OF GOD'S PROMISES.**

In the early church, Jewish Christians faced pressure from their fellow Jews to return to life under the Law. But only faith in Jesus saves. The letter to the Hebrews encourages us to hold onto Jesus, the Savior. We do that by faith. What is faith? **"Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."** Faith realizes things we don't have yet. Faith proves things we can't see. But this isn't "blind faith." We aren't jumping onto the tightrope and hoping we make it across. Faith is confident, like we have faith that the sun will rise tomorrow. That's something we hope for. We don't doubt it. It's the same with faith. We don't hope, like we hope it won't rain tomorrow. We believe like we know the sun will rise tomorrow. We are confident, not in spite of the evidence, but because of it.

That's what brought people praise in the Bible. **"This is what the ancients were commended for."** They believed God, and he praised them for it. So we follow in a long line of believers who found favor with God by faith.

In the beginning, God brought the world into being by his powerful Word. Faith takes hold of that truth. **"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made by what is visible."** We can't explain how the universe came into being beyond. God said the word, and it was. We didn't witness it. The world has its own ideas about how the world came about. Was it always here? Did it form as part of a big bang? They can keep their theories. For us, we have God's Word. Faith takes hold of God's Word. The same Word of God that created the world creates faith in our hearts. That is our proof. God said it.

We don't bury our heads in the sand and ignore all contrary evidence. Sure, much of evolution is true. No, we didn't descend from apes. God created the world in six days. God's Word is the authority. God cannot lie. He must be right. Faith is sure. Faith has its proof in God himself. The world can disagree. We don't follow the world. We follow God in this unbroken line of faith.

Moving day is stressful. Imagine you've packed your bags. Loaded boxes on the truck. Time to go to your new home. One problem: you don't know where you're going. You don't have a house to move into. Not even a destination in mind. No motor home. Just a map and a prayer.

Abraham made a move like that. He didn't know where he was going. But it wasn't "a blind leap of faith." He didn't move into a luxury home, but a tent. **"A stranger in a foreign country."** He went where God told him. By faith, he listened. He grabbed onto the promises God made to him.

Like Abraham and many before us, we live by faith. But do you live by faith? Can people see from your words and actions that you are **"foreigners and strangers"** on earth? Worldly thinking influences us from TV and movies, our neighbors and relatives. If **FAITH TAKES HOLD OF GOD'S PROMISES**, what are you trying to take hold of most in your life? For some, it's our spouse. Or we despise God's gift of marriage outright. The world tells you it's okay to view pornography, to live together before marriage, to have sex outside of marriage, or to divorce as though marriage is just a piece of paper. For others, it's children. We love them, but then we worship them as though they were most important. Sports practices take priority, but God gets left behind. For some, it's money. Build up your 401K, fill your house with trinkets that don't get you any closer to God. It could be work. You can bury yourself in your work, and then avoid the rest of your responsibilities to God, family and society. Maybe it's pleasure. Do whatever makes you happy. Enjoy life.

All these are fleeting. They are here today. They could be gone tomorrow. Yet we spend our time and money and effort on them as though these were the things that really mattered. Meanwhile faith is so intangible we leave it alone. Too often, we are guilty of living for the here and now.

Consider Sarah. **“By faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who made the promise.”** If you remember Sarah’s story from Sunday school, Sarah laughed when God said she, a 90-year-old woman, would have a son. At first it seems she was living by anything but faith. A 90-year-old bearing children offends reason! Sarah laughed. God repeated his promise. God’s Word changed her heart. She believed because of the one who made the promise. He is faithful.

We also believe because of the one who makes the promise. We are anything but faithful. We don’t always live in line with this faith. Like Sarah, sometimes we think God’s way is unreasonable. The way the world works makes sense. Like Sarah, we listen to God because he is faithful. He was faithful to his promise to Sarah. She bore Isaac to Abraham.

We believe because God is faithful to his promises. FAITH TAKES HOLD OF GOD’S PROMISES. He was faithful to Abraham, Isaac, and Isaac’s son Jacob. They all died, waiting on God’s promises. Waiting to possess the land. Waiting to see descendants as countless as the sand. God’s promises weren’t fulfilled in their lifetimes, yet they lived by faith.

God kept his promises. Abraham’s descendants—millions, came back to the land. It became their own. But Abraham’s descendants are more than those who inherited Palestine. Abraham’s descendants are those who believe like he did. They are those who have been blessed through Abraham, the original man of faith. FAITH TAKES HOLD OF GOD’S PROMISES.

God fulfilled his greatest promise to Abraham. All nations were blessed through Abraham. Abraham’s greatest descendant, Jesus, blessed all nations by giving his life. He is faithful. He didn’t make friendly with the world, but died for it. He lived the faith, always being faithful to what God had promised. He didn’t just live in faith, he fulfilled our faith. Every last promise, fulfilled in Jesus. He died for our faithless sins. He rose because God forgave us. He laid the foundation of the city we will inherit. He is the foundation of our faith.

Moving day has come. It’s time to move in. Your house stands out. A wonder. You wonder what you will do in this new house. You go into the basement. Its strong concrete slabs are built to last. As you climb upstairs, you begin to plan what you will put where. The future is here.

Abraham planned for the future, too. He lived in tents. He didn’t need a permanent home in this world. He set his sights higher. Jesus is the foundation of his home. By faith, Abraham took hold of the promised Savior. By faith, he reached his destination. He lived by faith. God approved his faith, credited it as righteousness. **“God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”** God approved of Abraham and all Old Testament believers because, by faith, they took hold of Jesus. God is not ashamed. It pleases him to save us in this way. We know, because he prepared the city. He has taken them to heaven.

That’s true for us, too. We are in the world, but we don’t belong here. Every day you pitch your tent as a stranger. Your true home is in heaven. God is not ashamed to be your God, either. He loves you as his dear child for the sake of Jesus. Jesus won a place for you in heaven by his life, death, and resurrection. Your FAITH TAKES HOLD OF HIS PROMISES. For now, we see our heavenly home by faith. God promised, so we believe.

You may not want to get in a wheelbarrow on a tightrope, but God’s promises moved his people to trust. His power raised Jesus from the dead. We believe in that God. Our faith is as strong as the object of our faith: Jesus, whose love has prepared a home in heaven for us. By faith, we take hold of this reality. FAITH TAKES HOLD OF GOD’S PROMISES. It takes hold of Jesus. Amen.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
Hebrews 12:2.