

God Is Faithful To His Promises

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[0 : 0 0] Now, turning back to the last portion of scripture that we read, the epistle to the Hebrews on chapter 11, Wiedinja verse 13, he is all died in faith not having received that things promised, but having sinned them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that there was strange ocean exiles on the earth, for people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God has not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city. And in looking at this passage, this evening, James says in his own letter that faith without works is useless. Faith without works is useless.

Where there is through faith, there will be consequent actions. And the writer here reveals to us the variety of actions that accompany the faith of the people of God. And the first thing we have to note from this passage is that faith embraces the promises and actively pursues their fulfilment. Faith embraces the promises of God and actively pursues their fulfilment.

Now, we all know that we are promised much by our politicians, and especially when election time comes around, and of course election time is now throwing near once again. And we can be sure that we will be bombarded with promises from each political party. And people are getting tired of these promises, so that is why we see such a low turn at election time. People are getting tired of promises that remain unfulfilled. We can almost be sure that most of the promises of not all that we are given by politicians over the next few weeks will remain unfulfilled.

Things are different, however, when we come to deal with God. For unlike men, as we read in verse 11 of this chapter, unlike men, he is faithful whom promised. God remains faithful to his promises.

God keeps covenant with his Son Jesus Christ, and thus with the beneficiaries of that covenant, who are the heirs of salvation. And that's me and you, if we are the people of God here this evening, we can place our trust in the promises of God. Just in case anybody doesn't know what a covenant is, it was something that was common in Abraham's day and long after Abraham's day, where the best example probably is where a king conquered another kingdom or a community. And these people who belonged to that kingdom or community, they were looked upon as a vassal state of that king. He made a covenant with them, laying down conditions that he would protect them. And as long as his protection lasted with them, they were to help him whenever he went to war with another king, whenever he went to war with another king. There were conditions, conditions could be laid down by both sides, by the vassal state on the king himself. Or sometimes it was just the king that was laying down the conditions. And God has made a covenant with his Son Jesus Christ, which we call the new covenant, where God has laid down conditions for his people, just as he laid down conditions for Israel of all. And we are to walk in obedience to his word, to his word. But the thing about God is that he keeps covenant in spite, very often of my disobedience and in your disobedience, God sticks to his promises.

[5 : 06] He doesn't come short of his promises at any time. Now the word these, with which the writer begins this passage in verse 13, the word these means, of course, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. And as the writer reveals to us, they all died in faith without having received the promises.

What were these promises? Well, we'll just, we'll just mention three. There was more than three, of course, but three were mentioning where the most important. They were promised a land.

That was the first. What's the first promise? They were promised a land. Second, they were promised descendants without number. And that's what we were reading in chapter 13. And we have it in chapter 12, the beginning of chapter 12, as well in the book of Genesis. They were promised a land.

They were promised descendants without number. And third, they were promised a seat that would be made a blessing to all nations. So Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah all died in faith without receiving these promises. All of these promises were physically and historically fulfilled long after the patriarchs were gone, long after they had died. Israel received the land of promise in the days of Joshua. Israel was made into a mighty nation, which was, which the descendants without number was looking to. They were formed into a nation on Mount Sinai when God gave them the law.

One wouldn't look in Israel at that time, look upon them as a mighty nation. But in the days of David and Solomon, they became a mighty nation, a nation that was feared, looked up to and respected by every other nation on the known world in that day. Finally, Jesus Christ comes into the world to bring the blessing of his kingdom to every tribe, tongue, chindrid and people. To every tribe, tongue, chindrid and people. No, one does not have to wait the New Testament minutely to realize that these promises were looking beyond, looking beyond the visible to things that are yet to come.

[8 : 10] And that is what the writer wants me unusually, hold of you. This is what this passage is all about. The promises were looking beyond the visible to things yet to come, things yet to come. And these patriarchs in their pursuit of these promises, in their pursuit of these promises, they were looking for something that they would eventually experience and enjoy.

So what were they looking for? They were looking for a spiritual homeland. They were looking to a heavenly city, to a heavenly city. And you see, the writer pictures the patriarch's existence in the land of promise, not as citizens within their own country, but as a surgeon in a country that was not their own, in a country that was not their own.

And these people of faith willingly leave their native land, willingly leave their native land in order to follow in obedience.

God's call and God's promise, accepting the status of aliens and foreigners, wherever they were going to be placed within the world.

And the writer is more or less telling me and you, that is the way we ought to conduct ourselves. That's the way we ought to live out our own lives, to follow the example of these people of faith. Now, when the faith of Abraham and his family, when the faith of Abraham and his family leads them, leads them to embrace a life of foreigners and aliens. Leads them to embrace a life of foreigners and aliens. This would of course mean living a life of lower status that was open to dishonor and to danger.

[10 : 50] That was open to dishonor and danger. In effect, the patriarchs willingly, willingly embraced this lower status.

Why? Well, it was a lower status in the world's estimation, but it wasn't a lower status in God's estimation, but in the world's estimation.

And they willingly embraced it. Why? In order to attain in the future to unhonoured status in God's sight and within God's city.

Now, the Greek, Roman and Jewish literature witnesses, the Greek, Roman and Jewish literature of this day witnesses to the fact of the importance of one's native land to one's sense of identity.

Living away from one's native land exposed a person to a loss of status, exposed a person to a loss of status and limited that person in accessing any real honour. He or she was limited in accessing any real honour. Now, one of the most popular writers of that day, Plutarch, he says that whatever success a person achieved in exile, living away from one's native land, opened a person or exposed a person to reproach and dishonor, to reproach and dishonor.

[12 : 54] Living as a stranger in a foreign land implies possessing neither citizenship, possessing neither citizenship or any of the rights that accompany such status.

Lack of citizenship in the ancient world left a person vulnerable to disgrace and to loss. To disgrace and to loss. Citizenship meant therefore security. It meant that a person had a solid foundation within our society. Whereas lack of citizenship left a person adrift, open or a prey to abuse and insult. And it would be far less comfortable for the person who lacked citizenship in the ancient world, even if he or she did not experience any abuse or insult, yet their defences were far weaker, far weaker in the face of abuse and insult than the defences of a person who claimed citizenship. And remember what Paul says in his letter to the Philippians. That your citizenship be in heaven from points we look for the Savior.

Now you translate that into the Gaelic and it means, Beegar kai behernev, let your way of life be heavenly minded. From points we look for the Savior to come again. Let your way of life be heavenly minded. Abraham dwelt in Canaan. Abraham dwelt in Canaan, the promised land as a sojourner in tents precisely because he wasn't looking to any earthly region as his dwelling place.

But he was looking, he was looking to this spiritual homeland as verses 13 to 16, you point out to us. As verses 13 to 16 point out to us. Abraham had no intention whatsoever of a great in his livings, his living quarters or his status in Canaan. He had no intention whatsoever of a great in his living quarters or status in Canaan, even when he arrived there, even when he arrived there. Why was that? Why was this? Because he was still looking to that better home land, understanding this to be the subject of God's promise to him.

And the mere fact that we don't, that we never find Abraham calling Canaan this home, reveals to us that Abraham was looking beyond the sin and the temporal, the sin and the temporal to what?

[16 : 50] To the heavenly city because he was seeing this as the object of God's promise to himself and to his descendants, to himself and to his descendants. And the promise to Abraham is interpreted for us in this letter as a heavenly west, a heavenly west. And everybody who is of the faith of Abraham, the writer here says that they all strive to enter into this west.

And how do we strive to enter into it? By keeping your focus not on the things of this world, but on the promises of God, on the promises of God. Abraham intentionally assumes, he intentionally assumes the posture of foreigner and Dalian. Why? Why? Precisely because he is waiting for this city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

And this is the goal of the pilgrimage of the people of faith. We always ought to remember that we are on our way to a better destination. We are waiting for us with some inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, stored in heaven for each and every one of us. And as we read in scripture, the earthly Jerusalem prefigures the heavenly Jerusalem.

The earthly Jerusalem, like every other earthly type of what is heavenly, is never perfect. We know that the earthly Jerusalem was destroyed twice by the Babylonians in 587, 587 BC and by the Romans in 1870. But the end time goal, the end time goal of the people of God is visualized in terms of her heavenly sign, as Paul reveals to us in his letter to the Galatians chapter 4 and verse 26, I think it is. Verse 20, chapter 4, the letter to the Galatians, chapter 4 and verse 26. If you listen to what Paul has to say here, but the Jerusalem above is free and she is her mother, for it is written, which I saw barren, one who does not bear. Read forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor, for the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.

And of course he is using an allegory here between Hagar and Sera. And then he goes on, now you brothers, talking to those who he was writing the letter to, now you brothers like Yaisa are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit. So also it is now. But what does the scripture say? Cast out the slave woman on her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. So brothers we are not children of the slave, but of the free woman.

[21 : 23] Sera is the mother of the people of faith, just as the heavenly Jerusalem, who is her mother and she is free. But as he says, as long as we are here, we shall and can expect persecution from those who have been born of the flesh and are still of the flesh.

Unlike the earthly Jerusalem, as we mentioned that was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC under Romans in 87, 1870. Unlike this earthly Jerusalem, who is open, which is open to all forms of violence, corruption and profanation throughout history even to this day. Unlike this earthly Jerusalem, this heavenly Jerusalem does have foundations that cannot be shaken, that cannot be shaken. And so because the foundations of this city are so firmly fixed, it will withstand the end time shaking that will remove every other earthly city and will transform the visible universe around us. The visible universe around us.

That is why scripture says here we have no continuing city. We have no continuing city, but we seek the city that is to come. We seek that city that is to come. I read this last week in chapter 12, at the end of chapter 12, chapter following this, 20 to verse 26, again, at that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens. This phrase, yet once more indicates the removal of things that are shaken, that is things that have been made in order that things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire. And if we go to the book of Psalms and Psalm 102, and the last few verses in Psalm 102, starting at verse 25, of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you will remain, talking about Christ. They will perish, but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. Your years have no end.

And both these passages reveal to us what is going to happen, but in the end time when Christ shall return, and Christ shall return. And it was because of the goal that Abraham was looking towards, the superior goal that he was looking towards, that he was unable to endure loss and hardship along the way. Being fully aware that citizenship in God's kingdom, citizenship in God's kingdom meant for him greater honor and security than any earthly kingdom could ever afford. And you and I are encouraged by the writer to have the same mind as our spiritual ancestor had, and keep our focus upon that city which is to come, as we journey on in this life. It will enable us to endure loss and hardship which will come away as it did Abraham, as long as we keep our eyes fixed upon the precious promises of God, that are all ye and our men in Jesus Christ, let us pray. O gracious and ever-blessed Lord, grant us to be thankful for the blessedness of the promises that you have given to us, and enable us Lord to look to the One who has gone before us as a breakthrough of the way, as the One who truly brought each and every promise that you have given to your people to our fulfilment. Help us to follow Him and help us to be thankful that there is a city prepared for your people into which they can enter and into which they can truly look to the rest that has been promised to them for a blessed are the dead to die in the Lord from henceforth save the spirit, for they shall rest from their labour and their works, do follow them.

[27 : 48] Lord that we would be of that number that will enter into that rest that has been prepared for the people of God. Forgive us for our many sins, bless your word to our hearts, and follow it with your blessing. And all that we ask that we would do so in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.