

Faith and resurrection

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[0 : 00] So, starting at Hebrews chapter 11, verse 17. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he had received the promises! was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

Good morning everyone. My name is Edar, for those who don't know me. I'm one of the church family here. As we begin, let's pray again.

Father God, I pray that you would encourage our hearts today with what we hear from your word. And to learn from the faith of our spiritual ancestors in the Old Testament.

[1 : 27] Please give us ears to hear, so that we may persevere all the way to the end. Amen. Now, before I begin, I just want to address the sensitive nature of death.

I know it can be an uncomfortable topic for many. While for some, it may not be something that you've given much thought to. Now, those in the congregation here who may have grieved the loss of a loved one in the past year.

Those who might have been to multiple funerals this year. Those for whom death may be not a far too distant future. I acknowledge that this can be very painful and sad to think about.

But, there is great hope in the face of death. And today's passage gives us great encouragement to have faith.

To those in the room who might tune out because death may not be something you have to think about much yet. Don't. Death will come for everyone one day.

[2 : 45] And so, with all that said, the question I want us to think about from today's passage is this. How can we trust God's promises in the face of death?

So that we can keep going to the end. Now, if you're joining us for the first time this summer, we have been making our way through chapter 11 of Hebrews.

And this was originally written to Christians who started well according to the end of chapter 10. Who joyfully persevered through trials and suffering for their faith.

But then became in danger of drifting away altogether. The painfulness of losing friends and family to death and the prospect of it is a timeless reality that no doubt was something they also had to deal with.

How could they trust God's promises in the face of death? So that they could keep going to the end. Now, two Sundays ago, Bruce very helpfully started this summer series with the encouragement that we've got to have faith.

[4 : 01] Indeed, we need to have faith. The author of Hebrews encourages us to have a faith like our Old Testament spiritual ancestors. And today, we are thinking in particular about the faith of Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Their faith exemplified the kind of faith that verse 1 describes. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

The conviction of things not seen. What do we learn about their faith? So we come to today's verses. Firstly, trust that death cannot stop God from keeping his promises.

Trust that death cannot stop God from keeping his promises. We're going to begin with verse 11, actually.

So verse 11, we first consider Sarah and Abraham's faith and the miraculous nature of their son Isaac's birth. Abraham, the one chosen to be the start of the nation of Israel, was 100 years old. [5 : 18] And Sarah, his wife, was 90 years old when God said that Sarah would bear a child. Now, you can imagine the disbelief from Abraham and Sarah, who laughed in response.

In the Genesis account, Abraham said, Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old? Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child?

Sarah was already way past menopause. But they showed their faith in God's words anyway. And that's why verse 11 says, By faith, Sarah herself received the power to conceive, even when she was past the age since she considered him faithful who had promised.

And verse 12 goes on to say that both of them were basically as good as dead. In terms of having a child together. Imagine our king and queen announcing the arrival of their first child together. You'd be gobsmacked. And Queen Camilla isn't even 80 yet. So you can really understand that Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead.

[6 : 42] And yet, God was faithful to his word, despite the seemingly laughable promise to the old couple.

Isaac was born, and as verse 12 goes on to say, through whom innumerable descendants came from. And this miracle child, as we see in verse 17, God used him to test the genuineness of Abraham's faith.

Whether you're familiar with the narrative or not, surely you can imagine the jaw-dropping moment when God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to him. The very child that God, as verse 18 says, Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

No way was God really asking Abraham to sacrifice him. Was it a mistake? Did God mean his other child instead?

But God meant it. And when you reflect on this later, feel free to read the account yourselves in Genesis chapter 22, where you would notice Abraham's obedience to God's command.

[7 : 59] Unlike when he laughed at God's promise of a child at 100 years old, there was none of that kind of doubt or laughing questioning here.

You can read of him rising early, took his only son Isaac, some wood, and a couple of men, and went off to offer him as a burnt offering.

He even told the two men accompanying them that they would both return. Now Abraham wasn't lying. He really was sure that they would both return.

Why? The author of Hebrews tells us in verse 19. He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Abraham had been given a faith to trust that even if he really did have to sacrifice Isaac on the altar, God would have brought him back from the dead so that he would be able to keep his promise.

[9 : 08] Abraham knew if God had promised that through Isaac his offspring shall be named, then he would have to bring Isaac back from the dead.

Who else would Abraham's offspring be named after? Isaac couldn't possibly die, at least not before he's had children to continue the family tree.

But just as Abraham pulled his knife on Isaac, God intervened and stopped him from sacrificing Isaac. God saw Abraham's faith and said, he's passed the test.

And so that's why it says in verse 19, Abraham, figuratively speaking, received Isaac back from the dead because of his faith in God's power over death.

And so a big sigh of relief, Abraham sacrificed a ram to God instead, and he and his son both returned home. Now, you may be thinking, okay, that's a really cool story, but what does that mean for us?

[10 : 17] Our faith may not be tested in such an extreme way as Abraham's was, but we can definitely learn from Abraham and Sarah's faith.

Even when Sarah was as good as dead in terms of having children, that did not stop God from keeping his promises. And even if Abraham obeyed God and sacrificed his only son, Isaac, he believed that that wouldn't stop God from keeping his promises.

And so we can firmly trust that death cannot stop God from keeping his promises. Now, if Sarah and Abraham can trust that in the face of death, they could still bear a child together, can we trust God to have power over death?

Yes. Yes, we can. And if Abraham can trust that God would raise Isaac from the dead, can we trust that one day God will raise us from our graves?

100%. Yes. We don't need to be like people who bank on cryogenic freezing to preserve their bodies at negative 196 degrees, hoping that someday in the future, someone might discover a way to live forever.

[11 : 42] Now, funnily enough, there is a way, and that's through Jesus. As Christians, our resurrection hope is so secure, we can be so sure that God will indeed raise us from our graves one day.

Now, we may not have seen someone physically come back from the dead, but we have eyewitnesses' accounts in our Bibles of Jesus rising from the dead and appeared to hundreds of people at once, proving who he said he is, the Son of God, Messiah, the one through whom our sins are forgiven.

And as the beginning of chapter 12 says, let us look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. He is the one through whom we have our resurrection hope. When we look to Jesus, we really do see that death cannot stop God from keeping his promises.

On the road to the cross, Jesus had faith in the Father. He trusted his Father like Abraham trusted God to resurrect Isaac.

[12 : 58] Jesus trusted that in his death, he will be resurrected on the third day, like we were singing earlier, and thereby completing the work of salvation. Jesus is the best example of encouragement that we have to trust God in the face of death.

And it is precisely because Jesus had defeated death that those who believe in him can trust God to raise us from our graves. God really does have power over death.

We can really confidently believe in that. And if he's proved this in raising Jesus on the third day after being buried, he will surely prove it again in the future when Jesus returns.

Brothers and sisters, this is such a wonderful hope that we can hold on to. And if you're here today as someone who doesn't believe in Jesus, then I would highly encourage you to seriously consider this wonderful hope that we have in the face of death.

To take it and to accept it for yourself. Moving on to verses 20 to 22. What can we learn from the faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph to help us trust in God's promises in the face of death?

[14 : 28] And to my second point. Trust God fulfills his promises even after we die. Trust God to fulfill his promises even after we die.

Now what pattern of faith can we learn from Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph? Clearly, God's promises to Abraham were passed down from each generation to the next, starting from Abraham to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob to Joseph.

And on their deathbeds, they each showed their faith in God's promises. Specifically, in the promises of land, people, and blessings.

And so considering Isaac first, verse 20 says, By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. Now Isaac didn't know how many days he had left to live.

And when he was frail and old and cannot see, he passed down God's promises to his son Jacob. Now listen to these words he said to Jacob in Genesis chapter 28.

[15 : 39] God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.

May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham.

Now there was a firm belief that God would be faithful to his promises to Abraham, to multiply his descendants, who would go on to take possession of the land that God gave to Abraham.

Let's go on. Moving on to verse 21. By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph. Now how did Jacob bless his grandchildren on his deathbed?

He made sure that Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, though they were born in Egypt, they were to be considered part of the family and thereby included in the promises of God.

[16 : 45] He blessed them and said, And then let my name be carried on and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

And so he blessed them that day saying, By you, Israel, will pronounce blessings, saying, God make you as Ephraim and us Manasseh. Now Jacob also said to them, Behold, I'm about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.

And so once again, you hear God's promise to Abraham appears in Jacob's final words to his grandsons. He blessed them to grow into a multitude, to pronounce blessings to others, and to be brought to the land of their fathers.

You can see a deep trust that God would be faithful to his promises, even after he's died. Well, what about Joseph?

Verse 22 says, By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

[17 : 55] Now, right at the end of Genesis, Joseph said on his deathbed, I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

And then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here. Hopefully you can see clearly again and again through these three generations, there was a faith in God's promises to be fulfilled even after they have died.

These guys were examples of having faith that looked like the assurance in things hoped for and the convictions of things not seen. Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, they were all okay with not seeing God's promises fulfilled while they were still alive.

They lived a life that gave them reason to believe that God fulfills his promises even after they die. Now, we're not like the kind of futurist that Elon Musk is.

He likes to make predictions about the future without much evidence to back him up. Most of his time, energy and money are invested in the development of space technology, AI, and electric vehicles, all in an attempt to realize his vision for the future.

[19 : 32] And by 2050, he reckons that a million people could be sent to Mars if we have managed to colonize it. Yet, no human has set foot on Mars and there's no proven safe technology to allow humans to live there.

And I'm not sure he will live long enough to see that goal achieved. And if he did, I highly doubt that he will live long enough to see humans live on planets beyond Mars.

Now, that is the view of a futurist like Elon Musk holds. What about for the Christian? Our vision for the future is shaped by God's promises.

For example, he promised that one day Jesus will return. So, when we come to the end of our lives, would we be thinking, oh, Jesus hasn't come back yet.

I thought he was going to come back soon. Oh, never mind, I'm just going to stop believing. Well, I certainly hope not. We have more reason to believe that Jesus will come back even after we die.

[20 : 46] More than Elon Musk believes he would see humans colonize Mars. We know that God indeed fulfilled his promises to Abraham. The Israelites were eventually led out of Egypt and they reached the promised land.

And by that point, there were hundreds of thousands, millions of Israelites. But it didn't stop there. As Christians, we know that as those who have faith in Jesus, we are the true children of Abraham. And we share in Abraham's faith when we put our trust in Jesus. God's promise that Abraham would be the father of nations was fulfilled as his descendants are every single individual who puts their trust in Christ.

Being on this side of history, we have every reason to trust God to fulfill his promises even after we die. So, what will we be saying on our deathbeds?

While you ponder that question, I found while researching the question myself, not many famous people's final words are particularly positive or encouraging, unlike Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph's final words.

[22 : 11] But, I did find two positive examples. The first was Harriet Tubman. She's best known in America for her remarkable efforts to end slavery.

She also happened to be a Christian, and on her deathbed, her final words were, give my love to the churches, tell the woman to stand firm, I go to prepare a place for you.

And another example is the late Tim Keller, whose final words were, there is no downside for me leaving. I'm ready to see Jesus. Send me home.

Now, from both of these examples, we see a tangible faith in another one of God's promises. He promised that one day there will be no more sin or death, and that there is eternal life for those who trust in his son, Jesus.

Harriet Tubman and Tim Keller's faith empowered them with confidence in their final words. These were believers who deeply trusted in God's faithfulness to his word.

[23 : 20] Having walked with him and experienced his faithfulness, they confidently trust in the promise that believers who have died are now with Jesus in paradise.

Christ. Now, you may personally know of other Christians whose final words on their deathbeds displayed a deep-rooted faith in God's promises.

And my hope and prayer for us all is that when we reach our final moments in life, we may be able to say to those around us, keep going, brothers and sisters.

God is faithful. Stand firm in the faith. Jesus will come back one day. We need to be okay with how Jesus may not return while we're still alive.

That shouldn't affect whether we trust him to return 1,000 or 2,000 years later when we would have long passed away. We live in a world of instant gratification everywhere around us.

[24 : 22] Whether that is getting groceries or a takeaway or watching a movie, you can do all of that with a few taps on your phone. But God's promises do not work like that.

We need to trust his purposes, his timing, and most of all, his faithfulness to his promises. Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, they never saw the promised land, but they didn't need to see it.

They believed in who God is, that he will do what he said he will do. And again, in light of the beginning of chapter 12, let us consider how Jesus exemplified this kind of faith.

While he was on earth, he trusted his father's promises. He trusted that God's purposes for salvation would be fulfilled in him, so much so that he obediently went to the cross and died on it for our sins.

Jesus trusted his father's faithfulness unto his death. So we too can trust that God will fulfill his promises unto our death.

[25 : 40] And so coming back to the question I asked at the beginning, how can we trust God's promises in the face of death so that we can keep going to the end?

we can all be confident Christian futurists. We can learn from our spiritual ancestors who have gone before us. We can really trust that death cannot stop God from keeping his promises.

And we can really trust that God will fulfill his promises even after we die. And let us ultimately look to Jesus who has exemplified the kind of faith that gives us the confidence to trust God's promises in the face of death.

He has defeated death and he's currently seated at the right hand of God so that we can have a firm faith in being resurrected one day.

And let this keep us going with endurance to finish the race set before us. Prayerfully, may we get to the end and be like Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Howard Tubman, Tim Keller, and other faithful Christians that you may have known, blessing those gathered around our deathbeds, encouraging others to keep trusting God's promises in the face of death.

[27 : 03] Let us pray to finish. Yeah, Father God, we thank you for the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Thank you that we can learn from them what it means to have faith in the face of death.

Please, may we be encouraged to have faith and to hold on just as they did, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Amen.