

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

DOES GOD PLAY FAVORITES?

PRIVILEGE COMES THROUGH THE PROMISE (ROM. 9:6-13)

MAY 8-14, 2016



MAIN POINT

We can trust God because of the promise He has fulfilled in Christ.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. How do you build trust and confidence in another person?

2. What makes you more or less likely to trust someone when they make a promise to you? What kind of people are you more likely to trust? Less likely?

Leader: Promises are more or less believable based on who is making the promise. The character of the promise maker matters. Beginning in the garden (Gen. 3:15) God made a promise to deliver a people to Himself through the descendant in a woman. This offspring is promised all throughout the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In Romans 9, Paul helps connect the specific promise God made to Abraham (that he would have a son) to the greater fulfillment of that promise in Jesus. In fact, all of God's promises throughout Scripture point to Jesus. We know that we can trust God because of the presence and work of Jesus in our lives.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Leader: Last week we talked about how God blesses His children and expects us to put those blessings to use by glorifying Him. As Paul continues in Romans 9, he explains that the privileges we have as God's children come as a result of "the promise," which refers to Jesus Christ. This means that our faith in God is rooted in the person and work of Jesus—His life, death and resurrection.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 11:1-12.

3. Look specifically at Hebrews 11:1-3. What characteristics did the writer of Hebrews use to describe faith in God?

Leader: In Hebrews 11, the author of Hebrews describes faith in terms of trusting God to the extent of having assurance His promised blessings are real and the events He has announced will occur. Faith on the one hand is the reality of what is hoped for. Faith is a firm conviction concerning the promises of God, an unyielding confidence that He will do what He says He will do. On the other hand, faith is the proof of what is not seen. Faith endures even when a particular promise of God does not come to pass on our timetable. We live by faith as Christians because our faith rests in Him, not in ourselves or in our abilities. Faith in God's trustworthiness is a thread that runs throughout all of Scripture and points time and again to Jesus.

4. Much of Hebrews 11 is a catalog of people in the Old Testament who demonstrated faith in God, one of whom was Abraham. Hebrews 11:8-12 speaks to the same promise as Romans 9:6-13. What was the promise given to Abraham?

5. What do we learn about trust in God's promises from Abraham's example of faith?

Leader: God promised Abram (Abraham) that he would have countless descendants at a time when the man and his wife seemed destined to remain childless. Abraham took God at His word, however, and Abraham's faith received God's approval. Abraham was just one of many Old Testament ancestors who received God's approval and blessing through trusting in God rather than trusting in themselves or in other created things (see Rom. 1:18-25). Ultimately, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham came through Jesus (see Rom. 4:13-25).

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 11:13-16 AND 11:39-40.

6. The people we consider heroes of our faith in the Old Testament never saw God's promises come to fruition through Jesus, yet they still believed. How is our trust or faith in God similar to and different from those affirmed in Hebrews 11?

7. What is the good news and hope for us in these verses? How does that truth impact your faith?

Leader: Throughout the chapter, the author provided examples of people in the Old Testament who exercised faith. He focused most heavily on Abraham and Moses. To complete the list with a crescendo, he recounted an inspiring litany of the fruit of faith displayed in the virtuous life, faithful death, and anticipated resurrection of numerous Old Testament heroes. However, although their faith was approved, they did not receive what God had promised. The purpose of this delay was to ensure that they would not be perfected apart from Jesus Christ. It's ultimately through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that we know for certain God is good and with us.

As children of God today, we have the added benefit of the Holy Spirit, whose presence in our lives helps us believe in Jesus and trust in God's promises. Some promises of God remain to be fulfilled through Jesus' return, and God expects the same degree of faith from us that He did from those who have gone before us.

8. How does your anticipation of Jesus' second coming and the final fulfillment of God's promises affect your daily living? How should it?

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

9. Second Corinthians 1:20 says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." How does this reminder of God's trustworthiness and promise-keeping nature encourage you today?

10. How do we make the promise of Jesus the center of our lives and the center of our community with one another?

11. What role do the promises of God in Jesus play as we attempt to share our faith with people who have not yet believed?

PRAYER

Praise God for His faithfulness. Thank Him that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. Pray that dwelling and thinking about the promises would lead you to cherish Jesus more and motivate you to live for Him.

MEMORIZE

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, 40 since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” –Hebrews 11:39-40

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

HEBREWS 11:1-16,39-40

11:1. Eyesight produces a conviction about objects in the physical world. Faith produces the same convictions for the invisible order. Faith shows itself by producing assurance that what we hope for will happen. Faith also provides an insight into realities which otherwise remain unseen. A person with faith lets these unseen realities from God provide a living, effective power for daily life.

11:2-3. These verses present two illustrations of the use of faith. First, faith enabled the heroes of the Old Testament to receive a good standing with God. God gave his approval to the faith of these saints. Second, believing that God created the world involves a leap of faith. Faith points to an unseen power who made the world we see. The universe involves more than the physical world. It includes the ages that God had planned, beginning with the act of creation and extending to the consummation of all things in Christ. By faith we know that all we see around us and all that takes place on earth came from one we cannot see. By observing creation we may learn of God's power. We learn the manner of God's creation only by responding in faith to the statements of Scripture.

11:4. Genesis 4:3-7 and the rest of the Old Testament do not explain why Abel's offering was more acceptable than Cain's. Hebrews offers the explanation: Abel showed faith. The fact that God accepted Abel's sacrifice showed that he had an obedient attitude of mind. In some way Cain held back from God, perhaps in his heart. Abel's offering was an unrestrained response to God, complete with lavish worship which pleased God. John tells us that Cain's works were evil, while those of Abel were righteous (1 John 3:12). Even though Cain murdered Abel, the faith of Abel still spoke over the centuries. Even a violent death could not muzzle the message of faith. Abel's demonstration of faith allows him to speak a message of encouragement to us today.

11:5. Genesis 5:24 reports: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." Two comments on this statement are pertinent. First, Enoch's release from death was due to his faith. Second, before his translation to heaven he had lived a life pleasing to God. In an age of corruption Enoch stood out as a man of righteousness. He showed his faith by his walk with God. Faith in a God he could not see controlled Enoch's life.

11:6. Real fellowship with God cannot exist without faith. Two convictions must characterize the lives of believers. First, they must believe that he exists. Anyone wanting to commune with God must have the deep conviction that God is real. Second, God's servants must believe that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Faith is not selfish; rather, faith has confidence in a God of love and goodness. These two convictions must provide a bedrock foundation for the lives of Christians. It would be foolish to look for a God who does not exist or for one who—if he did exist—would punish you if you found him.

11:7. Noah (Gen. 6-9) showed his faith in response to a specific warning from God. He took the warning to heart, built an ark, and saved his family. Noah's act of building the ark condemned the scoffing unbelief of his generation and provided visible evidence that Noah believed God. Noah's contemporaries must have been merciless in their ridicule of this "foolish" man who was building an ark so far inland. In building the ark, Noah became an heir of faith righteousness, a theme echoing Paul's discussion of the subject (Rom. 9:30; 10:6).

11:8. Abraham's faith shined brightly out of a dark background. Paul spent an entire chapter (Rom. 4) commending the faith of this spiritual leader. Abraham received a call to follow God which he accepted without question. He left Haran by faith (Gen. 11:31-12:4) and let God supply the road map. He did not receive his inheritance at the time of his first call, and he did not even know the location of the Promised Land. His daring faith earned him the title of "father of the faithful."

11:9-10. These verses add three facts about Abraham's faith. First, his faith extended to his family. Isaac and Jacob became linked as heirs with him of the same promise. Second, he showed a tenacious faith by living as a nomad in a foreign land without rights and privileges. Third, Abraham did not look primarily for a physical city in the Promised Land but for a spiritual city founded and built by God. Abraham wanted God to be the architect and builder of the city. The secret of Abraham's patient waiting was that he could see the invisible and move toward it.

11:11-12. Abraham's greatest demonstration of faith came when he showed faith in God's promise that he would have an heir. He was then one hundred years of age (Gen. 17:17; 21:5). Sarah at ninety (Gen. 17:17) embraced a promise which first caused her to laugh (Gen. 18:12-15). Both Abraham and Sarah shared the conviction that God was faithful to his promises. From these two elderly Hebrews who were as good as dead came a nation teeming with life as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

11:13-16. These verses summarize the piety of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Three features stand out. First, these men were still living by faith when they died. Faith ruled their lives as they faced life and death. Second, they did not receive the things promised. They endured in their faith because they had seen the promises and embraced them. They trusted God to give future generations what they only hoped for. Third, they confessed that they were aliens and wanderers on earth. They did not try to return to the comforts and ease of Ur and Haran in Mesopotamia. They looked for a heavenly city prepared by God. What was the outcome of such sterling faith? Despite the obvious failings of all these men, God was not ashamed to be called their God. He had prepared a spiritual city for them, and he was delighted to be known as their God.

11:39-40. The promises for which believers eagerly waited appeared only in Christ. Old Testament saints did not experience the eternal inheritance. Their faith earned for them a remarkable reputation and favor with God. They lived and died in the hope of a fulfillment which none of them saw on earth. The reaping of the benefits did not occur until Christ opened the box of spiritual treasures.

Verse 40 may have been a warning to some Jewish Christians who exulted in Jewish heroes so that they forgot their own shortcomings. Such believers needed the finishing work which Christian believers could provide. No part of God's community can be complete without the rest.

Christ's revelation of God's redemption allows all believers to experience their eternal inheritance. Ultimately, all the redeemed from all the ages will be gathered under Christ (Eph. 1:9-10).