

5—What are we waiting for?

Hebrews 10:32—12:3

Trusting God's promises isn't necessarily easy. It involves waiting.

- ▣ We are dealing with things we can't see or control.
- ▣ We are scoffed at and opposed by those who live by sight.
- ▣ These things show up our personal weaknesses.
- ▣ So, living by God's promises isn't for the faint-hearted!

But none of these difficulties need to tarnish our faith.

- ▣ God has opened his heart up to us. He's calling us to discover his faithful love.
- ▣ He wants us to live in this hope while we wait for his time of fulfilment.
- ▣ God enables us to live in his eternal plan—now. We just need some perseverance.

Many of us have lived through very pleasant times. This has made us think God's promises only relate to having more nice times. But God wants us to live in what the future will be while circumstances are difficult.

The letter of Hebrews has much to say about living by God's promises (Hebrews 10:32—12:3).

First, our fathers in the faith faced the same difficulties we do.

- ▣ Abraham and Sarah wait for decades for the child God promises them.
- ▣ They live among enemies in the land God says is his (11:12-13).
- ▣ Everyone in the Old Testament, must wait for the promises to be fulfilled (11:39-40).
- ▣ There are enemies opposing those who first get this letter. They have an option to live comfortably, but at the risk of giving up their faith in Christ. They need some help to live by what is unseen rather than what would be culturally safe (Hebrews 10:36-39).
- ▣ We are warned not to 'shrink back' from waiting for what God promises (10:36-39).
- ▣ God is painting on a large canvas and he needs us to step back—with him—and appreciate that more is going on than we may understand while we wait.

Second, hoping for things we can't see (or control) is no problem to faith.

- ▣ Faith is being assured (the word can also mean substance) and persuaded that what we hope for and cannot see is substantial (11:1).
- ▣ God himself creates this faith and when he does, we can 'see' what is invisible, experience what can't be measured and decide on the basis of what can't be projected.

Creation sets the pattern for understanding the world.

- ▣ Why is there something and not nothing? Why is there consciousness and not just instinct?
- ▣ What is seen *comes* from what isn't seen (11:3, 27). There was nothing visible—nothing to examine—before this. But faith is assurance and evidence that creation is God's workmanship.
- ▣ It's always God's word that makes things happen.
- ▣ Limiting ourselves to what is visible can't give us anything to hope for. That's why it *lacks* assurance—and substance.

- ❑ Understanding that God creates by his word answers to everything within us because we are made by and for God.
- ❑ Noah builds an ark in the light of things not yet visible (11:7).
- ❑ Abraham leaves his cosy life for one promised by God. He is looking for something God builds. Something solid (11:8-10).
- ❑ Paul says that seen things pass away. It's the unseen things that are durable (2 Cor. 4:18). This insight is foreign to the ungodly mind but natural to faith. Everything God does starts from what we can't see.

Calvin says,

'The Spirit of God shows us hidden things, the knowledge of which cannot reach our senses. Eternal life is promised to us, but it is promised to the dead; we are told of the resurrection of the blessed, but meantime we are involved in corruption; we are declared to be just, and sin dwells within us; we hear that we are promised an abundance of all good things, but we are often hungry and thirsty; God proclaims that he will come to us immediately but seems to be deaf to our cries. What would happen to us if we did not rely on our hope, and if our minds did not emerge above the world out of the midst of darkness through the shining Word of God and his Spirit? Faith is therefore rightly called the substance of things which are still the objects of hope and the evidence of things not seen' (qu. in Hughes).

Third, God is setting up a world where everything will be as he intended it to be.

- ❑ Hebrews calls it 'a better country', 'a heavenly one' (11:16). It's a kingdom that can't be shaken (12:26-28).
- ❑ If we believe God can't make anything better than what we see at the moment, he would be ashamed of being our God—ashamed that we would expect so little of him. Do we think God is satisfied with injustice, suffering and death? Are we happy for everything—including ourselves—to be no better than they are at the moment? Surely not!

We said earlier that all God's promises find their 'Yes' in Christ. And this 'Yes' includes what he has done in his first coming and what he will complete in his second coming.

- ❑ So, people who please God look for a city that has foundations (11:10)—not like the shaky things we tend to trust at the moment.
- ❑ Scoffers think the promise of Christ's return is a fiction. But Peter tells us the reason for his delay is not incompetence or carelessness but patience with our race (2 Pet. 3:2-4, 8-13).

Fourth, all the people who are waiting are, in fact, busy.

- ❑ The catalogue of accomplishments attributed to faith is impressive.
- ❑ Abraham doesn't sit and meditate. He leaves everything to take up what God is going to do with him and his family.
- ❑ Moses prefers trouble with God's people to safety as a celebrity in Egypt.
- ❑ Sometimes, God's people seem to succeed, and other times, seem to fail. But it's God who knows what will last.
- ❑ Being assured there will be a good outcome gives us energy, and a readiness to endure hardship.

If God's promises are ringing in our ears and warming our hearts (11:9, 11, 13, 17, 33, 39), we'll do things that fit God's eternal plan.

- ▣ We've been promised eternal life—and, by faith, we already have eternal life in us (John 5:24; 17:3; 1 John 3:15).
- ▣ We are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)—already part of the future God is making.
- ▣ Everything done through faith and love is eternal. Think of Jesus commending someone on judgement day for giving a cup of water to one of his servants (Matthew 10:42). Think of the clothes we'll wear when the church is married to Christ (Revelation 19:8).
- ▣ If you are a politician, you have to do things that fit the immediate situation. But if you are building what is eternal, you'll make sure you're doing something that Jesus will acknowledge.
- ▣ In fact, what is eternal is what is best for the world now. It's just that the world doesn't see it that way.

Fifth, we look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith (12:2).

- ▣ It's love that keeps hope alive. The Holy Spirit comes as an outpouring of God's love to us, and in us. This is why we don't get disappointed (Romans 5:5).
- ▣ God loves and commends this trust. And this adds to our assurance. Like children in a family needing the affirmation of their parents, we grow in confidence because we are accepted in God's family.

Listening to what God promises shows us that God has never given up taking the initiative in his world. And revealing them to us has opened up eternity to us!

So, when God makes promises, we will be taken out of our depth. We'll need to swim in deep waters. But then, this is what we are made for!

We've never been meant to live within the limits of what is visible. Rather, we are to live by every word that God speaks. And a lot of what he has said has said hasn't happened yet. So, we need to hear his promises, persist, and wait for our reward.