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SERMON TITLE: Faith Brings God Near
SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 30:11-20
DATE: May 19, 2019
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read Romans 10:6-13.

*M*any people make promises. In almost every area of life, you can get a promise.

Did your roof get damaged in the recent storms? Some roofing companies promise to give you a new roof for the simple cost of your insurance coverage. Do you believe them?

Or, if you need financial help, there are counselors and even Bible-based courses that promise financial success. Do you take the course and follow their advice?

If you need help with your body you have help! One program is even called the "Promise Diet." Would you sign up? What would convince you to pick its program?

Are these people trying to deceive you? Are you quick to dismiss their assurances, or have a wait and see attitude, or do you embrace the promises?

Today we look at a passage at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. It is the last book of the Pentateuch, commonly known as the Law or the five books of Moses. In chapter 30, the people of Israel prepare to realize the promises that were given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are at the Jordan River, ready to cross and enter the land of Promise.

Moses reminds them of the promises. But unlike what you and I might think of as inheritance, there is cost involved, just as there was cost involved for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

For example, Abraham was told "Leave your land and follow me to the land I will show you and I will make you a great nation." (Gen 12:1-2) And what did Abraham do? He left his land and followed. With each person the promise and the cost was repeated.

We are going to spend the next month talking about entering into the promises of God. What does it take? What is the cost? Let's read the Scripture. READ Deuteronomy 30:11-20

It begins with "this command is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away." (v. 11)

That's great! Think of going to get advice on how to be financially sound or physically fit or recover from a disaster.

Wouldn't it be great, wouldn't it help you to first learn that the promise you are seeking is not beyond your reach.

God says it's not just a heavenly thing and thus unreachable. Do you sometimes feel that the "spiritual" is distant and unreachable or not real enough or that you don't quite fit? God makes the spiritual realm accessible. He continues:

"My command is not beyond the sea either."

If you wanted to attain financial or physical health or overcome a disaster and one of those companies said to you, alright, you need to cross the sea to our office in England or Africa to gain our promise, you would have second thoughts, (although if they said Hawaii you might agree to go ☺). That would be expensive and time consuming. You would have to take time off, get a passport and buy a plane ticket—there are so many obstacles you would probably abandon the promise because the cost would be prohibitive.

God said, "As you go into the land to inherit the promises, follow my commands. It's not that hard but you must obey."

Israel had already failed to obey God's plans; even so, God's policy in fact is this:

"Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world [for your disobedience], from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors" (Deut. 30:4-5).

God is exceedingly generous with God's desire that you experience the promises.

Are you experiencing the promises that result from having faith in God? The people learned through the wilderness that faith *gives life and prosperity*. They were fed. They were healed. Their shoes and clothing did not wear out.

But God also says, 'you can ignore it and choose death and disaster instead.'

There was a little girl named Irene. She lived in a fairy tale so she was a princess. Princess Irene's mother was dead and her father, the king, was rarely home. She often felt alone and

frightened when she ventured into the world around the castle. But she did have a grandmother. She was rather mysterious but seemed to always be accessible when she Irene needed her. Once she hurt her hand and her grandmother healed it. After being lost, the grandmother gave her a magical thread which, as she follows it, unfaithfully leads her back home.

The princess made a friend, Curdie, who was a miner in the local mine. She learned that he was often tormented by the goblins that lived in the caves and in fact, one day some goblins captured and imprisoned him. Princess Irene helped him get out by using her magical thread. So Princess Irene offered Curdie the magical thread so in case he got in trouble again, he could be led out.

But Curdie could not see the thread and calls Irene's story "nonsense."

The results were interesting. Princess Irene was dismayed at his rejection of the thread. She did not understand Curdie's lack of faith. Curdie did not understand having faith. But faith makes the difference between life and disaster.

God said *the promise is as near as your lips and in your heart. Keep it. Walk by it.*

It's like Princess Irene's invisible magical thread. She had to follow the thread and it led her to safety. One person gains freedom and is able to see her way home because she believes. The other is stuck imprisoned by fear because he does not believe what is very near him.

Irene did not understand why he did not accept the truth she was trying to convey. Curdie did not embrace faith because he could not see it. All of us find ourselves somewhere along this spectrum of belief. Where are you?

When he returned home, Curdie said to his mother regarding the thread, "It's no explanation at all, mother; and I can't believe it."

She replied, "That may be only because you do not understand it. If you did, you would probably find that it was an explanation, and believe it thoroughly. I don't blame you for not being able to believe it, but I do blame you for fancying such a child as Irene would try to deceive you."¹

Our passage says the world will be a witness to your faith. People will see that you either believe or you do not believe by your actions.

How do we realize the promises God gives? We have a choice daily. It is in daily life that we access faith. Every day we grab the invisible thread or not.

God says, "Read the promises in the Word, and believe them. Believing them means you will walk in them." For instance, you will have a chance to be generous daily. If you are, you will receive generously from God. You will have a chance to exercise forgiveness regularly. If you forgive others you will be forgiven. You will have a chance to approach problems with prayer. If you pray expecting an answer, God will answer and help you.

When in the wilderness heading to the Promised Land, Israel constantly doubted. Would they get bread? Water? They struggled daily with faith, even though they had experienced God's provision numerous times. This disobedience was very annoying to God and delayed their journey. Faith is a daily thing, accessible to your life. God says faith is necessary and you access it through the Word.

How do we conquer the promises? Believers must live by faith.

"But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy" (Deut. 30 17-18).

We have a choice. God greatly desires that you make the right choice.

"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" (30:19).

Do you want to gain the promises of God? You will find yourself confronted with this choice again and again. Anytime you choose faith, your life can be turned around to one of blessing. What is your choice? Faith draws God near.

"You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life." (v. 20)

AMEN

¹George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* [1872] (London: Puffin, 1996), 17 in *The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*, by Alan Jacobs (New York: HarperOne, 2005).