

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #28

Hebrews 11:17-22

As we began this chapter of Hebrews, we said faith that pleases God is a faith that literally believes the book of Genesis. Faith that pleases God starts by believing God created the heavens and the earth (Hebrews 1:3), which begins the Bible at Genesis 1:1. Faith that continues to please God is a faith that continues to believe everything in the book of Genesis right to the last two verses of Genesis (50:25-26) in matters pertaining to Joseph.

In these verses the writer of Hebrews uses **four final illustrations from the book of Genesis** to illustrate the kind of faith that pleases God. **It seems to me that a common hidden theme here is that these events that demonstrated the faith of those mentioned occurred later in life, episodes that occurred relatively close to each person's death; and their faith was such that it believed God even in the face of visual and natural improbabilities.** In fact, three of the individuals mentioned here are on the verge of death. So what this tells us is that our greatest demonstration of our faith in the Word of God may actually blossom as we age and as we near our own death. Truth is, many of these believers had lost their physical strength, but they had strong faith. They were so old that they couldn't act anymore, but they could believe. It seems to me that a point we may glean from this is:

HEROIC FAITH IS A FAITH THAT KEEPS ITS FOCUS ON BELIEVING GOD AND HIS WORD EVEN AS ONE GETS OLDER AND MOVES TOWARD DEATH.

Now the actual demonstration of faith that shows up in these verses goes against the grain of visual probability. **These faith heroes had God's Word to believe, but they certainly could not actually see what they believed.** They took God at His Word by faith literally. As their days were winding down, they had a faith that was "full of expectation" in what God would ultimately do. There are four final illustrations that come to us from the book of Genesis.

ILLUSTRATION #1 – The illustration of the faith of Abraham in the sacrifice matter pertaining to Isaac. **11:17-19**

One of the greatest examples of faith in Hebrews 11 is the faith of Abraham. **Abraham had a faith that did trust in the literal Word of God (11:8-10), and Abraham had a faith that literally was successfully tested by God.** The test to Abraham was a major one that came in later stages of his life. Faith that pleases God is often a faith that really blossoms when one is older and may be tested when one is older. **Abraham had a faith that believed in a substitutionary sacrifice and also a resurrection.**

Abraham had waited 25 years for a son and now he was well over 100 years old and he had a son Isaac. All of the hopes that he had for God making him a great nation and getting a land and having all of the promises of God fulfilled were based on his son Isaac. Abraham finally had an heir and he knew that this son had been given to him and to Sarah by God.

God tested his faith by requesting that he take his only, loved son Isaac to the land of Moriah to offer him as an offering (Genesis 22:1-2). The specific location of the sacrifice is as Dr. Merrill Unger said, the mountaintop in Jerusalem where the Temple eventually stood (II Chron. 3:1) (*Unger's Commentary on the O.T.*, Vol. 1, p. 71). Tradition says that this is the exact place that is presently occupied by the Dome of the Rock, the Muslim mosque that was built in A.D. 691.

Abraham rose early and took Isaac and began a three day trip from Beersheba to this mountain spot (Gen. 22:3-4).

There were two things Abraham believed as he made this trip:

- 1) God would provide a substitutionary lamb so that he would not have to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:8);**
- 2) God would raise his son from the dead if he did sacrifice him (Heb. 11:17-19).**

Now if we keep in our minds that this book of Hebrews exalts Jesus Christ, we may certainly see the application of Abraham's faith to our lives. Faith that pleases God is a faith that may be tested and will continue to believe in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His resurrection.

What is most interesting about him believing in a resurrection is that at this point in time there were no instances in which there had been a resurrection. But Abraham believed God could and would do this. Abraham kept his faith focused on God's Word.

It has been well observed that we will never lose anything by trusting God in the dark. Putting your total trust in the Sovereign God to help you when you are faced with seemingly impossible things is never wrong.

Now, as we have said, this has real meaning to the book of Hebrews because this is one of the most moving pictures of God the Father and God the Son working in harmony to provide a substitutionary sacrifice whereby we may be saved. The reason why God stopped Isaac's sacrifice was because he was a sinner and his sacrifice would never have accomplished anything salvific. However, One would come through this line of Isaac, Jesus Christ, who would sacrifice Himself and would be raised from the dead. This would be the only One who can save sinners and ultimately give Israel her land.

There is only one mountain spot in the world where God will accept you; it is at Golgotha. There is only one way to get to this spot and that is by faith.

I have seen evidence of this Abrahamic faith in many of God's people as they have had to face the death of a loved one and even their own death. They believe their loved one has gone to be with the Lord, and they believe they too will go to be with the Lord. They believe one day they will be reunited with their loved ones. That is exactly the same kind of faith of Abraham.

ILLUSTRATION #2 – The illustration of the faith of Isaac in the blessing matters pertaining to the future of Jacob and Esau. **11:20**

The circumstances behind Isaac demonstrating a heroic faith is bizarre. The background of a demonstration of a faith that pleases God is a story of deceit and trickery.

As near as we may determine, Isaac was somewhat of a strange, passive type of guy. Most guys are looking over the girls when they are teenagers, but not Isaac. His father, Abraham, had to go find him a wife when he was 40 because apparently he wasn't out looking himself. Now there is nothing wrong with remaining single today if one chooses to do so. However, Isaac needed a wife because the entire Abrahamic promises hinged on him having a wife and having children.

Isaac was a guy who really liked food. S. Lewis Johnson said that he pictured Isaac having a lot of extra pounds on him because he was a guy who truly loved food, which becomes the basis for this illustration (*Hebrews 11:20-22*, p. 2).

He liked food so much that he wanted to eat a good venison steak (probably much like elk) before he would give his blessing to Esau (Gen. 27:1-5). He had nearly lost his sight, but not his appetite (Gen. 27:1). It was this episode that led to Jacob tricking Esau out of his birthright. It was this episode that led to the blessing matters that end up here in Hebrews. The historical background of the blessings to which the writer of Hebrews is writing about here is Genesis 27:28-29 and Genesis 27:37-40.

Isaac is nearing his own death and he blesses both of his sons, but he blesses the wrong son first because he was tricked. Now here is the thing. Once Isaac realized he had blessed the wrong son, he could have changed his mind and made things right. However, this is the point of **Hebrews 11:20**; Isaac was thinking of "things to come" and he realized that God's hand was in this. He realized that Jacob would have the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant, not Esau, even though he also blessed him (Gen. 27:38-40).

Certainly one thing stands out about this and that is, as Isaac was nearing his own death, his mind was totally focused on "things to come." He knew Jesus Christ would come through Jacob (Matt. 1:1-2).

ILLUSTRATION #3 – The illustration of the faith of Jacob in the blessing matter pertaining to the future of Joseph's sons. **11:21**

It is amazing to me that Jacob ends up in the heroic faith chapter of Hebrews when you think about the fact that he was a liar, a schemer, and a thief as a believer. He had been, as one writer said, "a crafty crook." Yet here he is in Hebrews 11.

It has been well observed that God appeared to Abraham seven times and reveals something to him, and when He did, Abraham believed God and followed God. On the other hand, God appeared to Jacob five times and every time God appeared to him it was to correct him or to cause some change in his life. Jacob had been a wanderer most of his life, but as his life neared its end, he was now settled down in his faith.

As I said, it is amazing that Jacob ends up in the faith chapter. But this is good news for the rest of us; because even though we too may have messed up time and time again, we too can finish a faith hero.

Now the illustration that is used pertaining to the faith of Jacob comes from Genesis 48:9-21:

- 1) Jacob asked Joseph to bring him his two sons so he could bless them. 48:9
- 2) When the two boys came, he kissed each one and embraced them as he would full sons. 48:10
- 3) Manasseh was the oldest son and Ephraim was the youngest son. Since Joseph is standing in front of Jacob, his right hand should go on the eldest son, Manasseh, and his left hand should go on the youngest son, Ephraim, and Joseph did everything he could to orchestrate that. 48:13
- 4) Jacob (Israel) by faith crossed his hands and being guided by God and knowing the will of God, he put his right hand on Ephraim the youngest and his left hand on Manasseh the oldest. 48:14
- 5) Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, fully acknowledging them to be his sons by judicial calculation 48:15-16
- 6) Joseph was so upset by this that he actually grabbed his father's hand and attempted to reverse them. 48:17-18
- 7) By faith Jacob refused to change his hands in this blessing because he knew the will of God and he knew that the younger would be greater than the older. 48:19-20

Now what is the main faith issue about the second born being greater than the firstborn? How does this connect to this book of Hebrews and put Jacob in the faith hero chapter? We have seen this thing before in Scripture: Isaac the second born was greater than Ishmael the firstborn. Jacob the second born was greater than Esau the firstborn. Now Ephraim the second born is greater than Manasseh the firstborn. What is this business all about in this book of Hebrews?

It is all about Jesus Christ. You see the blessings of God are not found in the first Adam but in the second Adam (Romans 5:14-21).

Jacob apparently understood the ramifications of this and by faith stayed focused on this. He knew about One who would come who could redeem him from "all evil" (Gen. 48:16). By faith, as he neared his own death, he was focused on this One.

ILLUSTRATION #4 – The illustration of the faith of Joseph in the future burial matter pertaining to his own body. **11:22**

Joseph had a faith that one day he and all Israel would live in the Promised Land. Joseph believed that the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be Israel's literal land and that is where he wanted to be buried.

People are still all fuzzy about this. The land has been promised by God to Israel. I don't care what you think or what anyone thinks. God has promised every inch of the Promised Land to Israel and I believe, just as Joseph believed, that one day she will own every inch of it.

The land does not belong to Egyptians or Arabs. It belongs to Israel. The whole question pertaining to land in Israel is a question of the Bible.

Do you literally believe the written Word of God? Do you literally believe what God revealed in His Word? Joseph literally believed and this puts him in Hebrews 11.

Now you may ask, how in the world will Israel ever get this land? Well Joseph saw it and tells us how it will happen. He said in Genesis 50:24, "God will surely ... bring you ... to the land, which He promised." There is the secret and there is how it will happen - God will do it!

Joseph had faith that God would do that. He believed that the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob He would literally fulfill. He believed it and any here tonight who believe it have a heroic faith just like Joseph.

What is amazing is that nothing but bad things had happened to Joseph in that land. He only lived in it for a short time as a boy. He had been sold out of it as a slave to Egypt. So Joseph, as he nears his own death, doesn't have a bunch of fond memories about the Promised Land. He had lived a good life in Egypt and he died an honored man in Egypt. But that is not where he wanted to be buried.

What Joseph did know and believe was that God had promised a specific land to Israel and he believed that with all of his heart and that is where he wanted to be buried. Even though he had an amazing successful career in Egypt, he believed the land promises of God.

Ultimately it was Moses who would take the bones of Joseph back to the Promised Land because of Joseph's request (Exodus 13:19).

Here is what we have - we have four stories of older people who really were solidified in their faith near the end of their lives. Are you solid in your faith tonight? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the only One who can redeem you from "all evil"? You keep your faith focused on Jesus Christ and you keep literally believing the Bible, including the book of Genesis, and you have a faith just as heroic as those mentioned here.

As we get nearer and nearer to the end of our lives, if it turns out to be God's will that we go into His presence via death, may each one of us have the same kind of faith as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Two questions we need to ask ourselves:

1. Does God's Word say it?
2. Do I literally believe what God's Word says?