

September 21, 2008

“The Race / The Message”

Over the last several weeks, we have been taking a journey through Hebrews 11. We have seen that we have been called to run the good race; a race that expresses our faith. A race that others ran; others like Abel who offered his best lamb as a sacrifice; or Jim Elliott who gave up his life to bring the Gospel to the Waodani Tribe in Ecuador; or Noah, who as a senior citizen, built an ark despite not knowing what an ark really was, or what the rain was that God had promised which would come; or Polycarp, another senior citizen who boldly stood in the Roman theater and proclaimed “I am a Christian!”; or Abraham who moved from his homeland and became a stranger in a foreign country and was willing to sacrifice his son knowing that God would bring him back to life; or Ghorban Dordi Touranie who went back to his homeland of Iran to share the message of the Gospel and died because of it.

Faith is what this sermon series is all about. And according to Hebrews, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, it is the certainty of what is not seen, it is the knowledge that God is Creator, and it is faith by which all of these individuals were commended. Faith is an important issue and faith is an important doctrine of the church.

Today we take a little bit of a different track because the next pillars of faith probably hit very close to home. The writer to the Hebrews lumps Isaac, Jacob and Joseph together in something that doesn't sound all that spectacular on the surface. However, I think after today, you may well think that theirs is one of the greatest and most practical expressions of faith that there is to this day. Listen again to what is said about them in Hebrews 11, verses 20-22. “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.” Wow! Isn't that great?! In all honesty you're probably thinking right now, what's so great about that? There's really no great action here by Isaac, Jacob and Joseph like Abel's or Noah's or Abraham's. Oh but there is. What exactly did Isaac do? “(He) blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.” What does that mean? Isaac passed on the promises of God to his sons. It's right

there in Genesis 27. Jacob received a blessing that followed the pattern of God's blessing and promise to Abraham. It was a blessing based on faith that God would provide him with offspring, that his lineage would produce a great nation and that the Messiah would come through his family line. It is a blessing based on what is not seen, and what is hoped for. Isaac had heard it from his father Abraham. He believed it and he passed it on to his sons. In particular, he passed it on to Jacob, who "when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff." Jacob took his blessing and passed it on to his sons and to his grandsons. Again, you find these blessings in Genesis chapters 48 and 49. They are a blessing of faith. A blessing or statement of what God would do in his sons lives. A blessing that was so specific that it even named the line of Judah as the family that would bring the Messiah. Yet it's more than a blessing. Jacob goes a step further and he gives an object lesson to his sons. In his old age, he continued to worship God, even though he had to lean on his staff to stay standing. You see, you stand when a king comes or when a king speaks. This is why in our church service; we rise and stand for the reading of the Gospel. It shows reverence and respect. It is consistent with what we are told about our worship in Hebrews 12, verse 28 where the writer says, "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." Jacob passed on his faith through the words of his blessing. And Jacob passed on his faith through the reverence of his worship. I'm sure his sons looked at him and remarked, can you believe it, Dad's standing? Dad is still standing as he worships God. But that leads to his sons, and in particular, Joseph. Joseph did not give his sons a blessing. As we saw, his father Jacob, (his sons' grandfather) already had done that. Like his father though, Joseph did give his sons a statement of faith. And he gave them an image that they would keep in their hearts and minds for generations to come. It was an image of faith; an image again, based on the blessing to Abraham. God had promised Abraham that He would give him and his offspring the land that we call Israel and they called the Promised Land. Joseph was living in Egypt. Yet, as he lay on his deathbed, he gave instructions that his bones be taken to the promised land when God fulfilled his promise. For four hundred years, those words of faith were passed from generation to generation. Then, when God sent Moses to Pharaoh with a message, "Let my people go," and then struck Egypt with the ten plagues; God's people, a people of faith, began the exodus to the Promised Land. At the forefront of the procession, the sarcophagus of Joseph; that Egyptian coffin that contained his bones. In faith Joseph stated his burial place and in faith his offspring fulfilled it.

Malachi 2:15 tells us that a man and a women come together in marriage and become one for a reason. Listen to the reason the Prophet gives for this institution of marriage. “And why one? Because he was seeking Godly offspring.” Every parent, grandparent and potential parent here today needs to look at the faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and realize that like them, we are called to pass the message of salvation on to our offspring in both word and deed. We are to raise up for God, Godly offspring. And if we really believe what the bible says, if our faith is real, how can we **not** do this? There is no greater gift that can be passed on to a child, a grandchild or a great grandchild.

Each week I've taken a story from the book, Voice of the Martyrs to show us an example of modern day people of faith. Today, I do not. Why? Because I couldn't find his or her name there. But you know who they are. I'm sure you have their picture; it's probably on your mantle at home, or maybe on the nightstand next to your bed. Or maybe it's just a picture that you carry within your heart. That's why your here. It's Mom and Dad, its your grandparents, for me it's George F. Duerr and Joyce L. Duerr. It's Nana & Papa, Its Grandma, Mom. Most likely you like me are here because of their faith which they passed to you. May we continue in this heritage of faith!

In our Savior's name, Amen