



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 30th June 2019

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Scripture: Hebrews 11:20-22

Subject: Part 35 – The Faith of the Patriarchs

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

So far, we have covered quite a large track of biblical history from the book of Genesis. We have observed amazing people of faith and hopefully, we have learned personally from them. As we have looked back, we have seen that God has a plan and His purpose is unfolding in human history. God holds all time in His hands. In Chapter 11 we have seen that Faith is pivotal. Why is Faith so important and even necessary? Well, without faith it is impossible to please God, without faith it's impossible to receive God's approval, but by faith we believe the promises of God and that God has the power to fulfil them and rewards those who diligently seek Him. We have seen that there are only two kinds, saving faith and sinking faith, one lifts you up and the other weighs you down. Jesus put it like this in John 3:18

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Faith is not just what we believe about but in whom we believe, and as a result it becomes a way of life. We become believers in Christ not just in mind and thought but in heart and life. We are different, our world view is different, our standards are different. We are not governed by the world views or values but by God and what He has revealed. It ought to affect the way we behave and the way we interact with people in the faith and outside of it. We are after all “*new creations*” as 2 Corinthians 5:17 teaches us.

Another striking observation that we made in these verses, is that faith is something that can be passed on. If this is so, do you think that it would be right to say, so can our lack of faith be passed on? Isaac believed the promises God gave his father Abraham and Isaac passed it on to his son and so on.

The writer of Hebrews spent some time reminding the reader of these stories. They were known to them by heart, just like so many people here know these accounts. But let's be real, it is one thing to know these stories by heart and another to take them to the heart and allow God change the heart for His glory. We can know a lot without profiting from our knowledge. Have you allowed these verses to enrich, encourage and even establish your faith?

At this point of chapter 11, when you reflect privately, can you honestly say that your faith now includes counting on the promises of God and His purpose for your life? Or do you still need a little more time, (don't worry there is still a lot more verses to go in chapter 11!). Remember, faith is living and it needs to grow. Only you can do that in your heart and life. We are faced with the challenge of allowing these accounts to enrich our lives. We are also invited to think about not just the past, or even our present, but what does our future look like, what are the blessings and what are the promises we look forward to being fulfilled?

The people we have studied so far allowed God's Word and His promises to take hold of their minds and hearts. Of course, they battled with their failures and doubts, yet, they focused not on them but on the greatness of God who called them. His un-changeableness, His glory, His faithfulness, His love, His longsuffering, His justice, His redemption, His promises. All of which, we can still focus and count on. In fact, we have seen the fulfilment of many of the promises, and we can identify with these people as we look forward to the promises yet to be fulfilled.

Think just for a moment of from where God has taken you and to where He is bringing you? Of course, we say that we are undeserving, but I'm sure we would all agree when I say, we can't help feeling at the same time delighted, even thrilled, that we couldn't be more blessed than we are right now. God has not forgotten us nor has He forgotten His purpose for us.

Faith is far richer than we often think. In fact, the riches of faith are usually seen during times of stress and even upon death which is what verses 20 to 22 are starting to introduce. Matthew Henry once said regarding this matter -

"Though the grace of faith is of universal use throughout the Christian's life, yet it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its great work to do at the very last, to help believers to finish well, to die to the Lord so as to honour Him, by patience, hope and joy so as to leave a witness behind them of the truth of God's Word and the excellency of His ways."

God is glorified when His people leave this world with their flags flying at full mast. If anyone should die triumphantly it should be believers. When the Holy Spirit triumphs over our flesh, when the world is consciously and gladly left behind for heaven, when there is anticipation and glory in our eyes as we enter into the presence of the Lord, our dying is pleasing to the Lord.

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones" (Psalms 116:15).

The three patriarchs mentioned in Hebrews 11 verses 20 to 22 have great faith concerning things to come, even in the face of death. These men's lives were not always flagships of faith. They trusted God imperfectly, which we can all relate too. Yet, all three men's names appear frequently and favourably in Scripture, and we are inclined to think of them as models of the life of faith.

The emphasis of this passage, however, is on the faith that Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph exhibited at the ends of their lives. Each one faced death in full, confident faith. Many believers find it difficult to anticipate and to face death. Yet a Christian who, for the most part, has walked with God faithfully often finds that the last hours of his life are the sweetest. Whatever the ups and downs of their lives, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph went out basking in the sunlight of true faith.

What makes the dying faith of these three men so significant is that, like Abraham, they died without seeing the fulfilment of all of God's promises. They passed them on to their children by faith. They had received the promises by faith and they passed them on by faith. Out of the seven promises God gave Abraham in Genesis 12, Abraham did not see The Possession of the land of Canaan, the creation of a great nation of his descendants or how the world would be blessed through these descendants. Still, Abraham died in faith, saying,

"Isaac, you will see the beginnings of these promises."

Isaac also died in faith, saying the same thing to Jacob; and so, Jacob also to Joseph. Hebrews 11:13 applies to all four men:

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."

They were so confident in God's word that they passed on the promises to their children. They believed and passed on what they had never seen because they had the assurance of faith. They considered the promises God had given them as a family to be of more value and more importance than anything material they could have possessed. While they had not seen the land possessed, nor the nation established, nor the world blessed, but they saw the promises by faith, and that was enough. They never doubted that the promises would come true.

They did not die in the despair of unfulfilled dreams, but in the perfect peace of unfulfilled promises, confident because they were God's promises. They knew by faith that God would fulfil the promises because they knew God is a covenant keeping God and a God of truth. They died saying, *"They will come. In God's time the fulfilments will come."* They died defeating death, knowing that, even though they died, God's promises could not die. That is a magnificent kind of faith, the kind of faith God honours.

Just as the saints mentioned in Hebrews 4:19, these three men are presented to show that the principles of salvation by faith and of pleasing God by faith, did not originate with the New Covenant. Faith has always been the way, never works. Without a single exception, every person of God has been a person of faith. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob,

nor Joseph were never saved by works. All were saved by faith. Without faith it has always been impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Isaac's Faith

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. (11:20)

Just as his father had done with him, Isaac passed on the blessings of God's promise to his sons by faith. He had absolute certainty that they would come to pass. We were introduced briefly to Isaac last week in Genesis 22 when he was a young man who was a submissive son willing to die and in the next place, we saw him in a field waiting for his bride.

He lived the longest than any of the patriarchs yet he isn't in very many chapters. Isaac was easily the least spectacular and the most ordinary of the four. He was less dynamic and colourful, being generally quiet and passive.

We know more of his failures than of his successes for example in Genesis 26, just like his father, he lied about his relationship with his wife in fear that the men in Gerar would kill him so they could take her. Just like the Pharaoh, God showed the Philistine King the truth. Isaac lied in spite of God's promises, even though the covenant promises to Abraham were passed on to Isaac directly by God as we see in Genesis 26 verses 3 and 4; and he lied in spite of God's reassurance that he shouldn't be afraid because God would bless him.

But like his father, Isaac was more concerned about his own life than his wife's and this concern was stronger than his faith. Isaac often was cowardly and spiritually weak, but notwithstanding of all of his weaknesses and even compromises, God blessed him.

Surely this can be an encouragement for us, something that gives us hope. The bible doesn't dress up the heroes of faith, it tells us about their flaws and failures, while it tells us of how gracious God is with them, how long suffering is He and what a promise keeper He is.

Like Isaac's mother Sarah, his wife Rebekah was barren and Isaac pleaded to the Lord. In chapter 25 of Genesis, in verse 23, God gave his wife Rebekah a promise of having twins.

And the Lord said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."

The senses took precedence for Isaac – the feelings, the hunger, the blindness; these all took over faith and God’s promises. Isaac favoured Esau while Rebekah favoured Jacob. Favouritism is a terrible thing. A divided home often leads to division and this is exactly what happened here. Some bible scholars have written that from the age of 137 years old Isaac was starting to think about his death. He lived to be 180 years by the way, so he was 43 years talking about his death. Some biblical scholars interpret this as Isaac’s impatience to give Esau his blessing, because this was the traditional thing to do. The eldest son was always given the inheritance but that is not what God had ordained.

When Isaac thought that he was going to die, he asked Esau to go out and kill "*some game and prepare a savoury dish*" for him before he pronounced the blessing on this elder son (27:7). He was thinking more of his stomach than of God’s promise. He must have known from Rebekah that God intended for Jacob to receive the inheritance rather than Esau. Yet he was determined to give the blessing to Esau. While Esau was trying to catch some game, Rebekah dressed Jacob up to resemble Esau to catch the blessing from Isaac who at this stage was not just old but blind. Jacob went along with the lie and by the time Isaac found out what had happened, it was all too late. The younger received the blessing so that the older would serve the younger just as God told Rebekah.

Chapter 27 of Genesis is not the finest hour for the family of faith. This point of the account really brings to the boil, the division that occurred within the family because they chose their own ways instead of being obedient to God and allowing God to do things His way. Yes, God’s purpose was ultimately fulfilled but they all lost out on peace and blessing on various levels. How applicable that is to our lives! We need to allow God to fulfil his purpose in his way, otherwise we will lose out.

Isaac insisted on giving the blessing to the son who he knew was not God’s choice. Esau sold his birth-right for stew, and Jacob went along with his mother to deceive his father and Jacob ended up having to leave the home, having major fall out with his brother and Rebekah never seen Jacob again and her actions made Esau want to hurt his mother.

Esau sought a blessing from God but he was not really repentant. He was sorry for what he lost not for what he did. It was not until the irreversibility of the blessing was obvious to Jacob that his faith began to display evidence. Could Isaac have reversed the blessing when he

found out?? Isaac had one blessing to give but I would also suggest that once the blessing was given, he was convicted that that was what God intended all along.

Regardless, of Isaac's will, he understood God had a future for his family. As he faced death, he blessed Jacob with the blessing that neither he nor his father had possessed and that neither Jacob nor his sons would possess. Isaac blessed Jacob in faith, knowing that God would fulfil the promises in His own way and in His own time. Remember the promise did not solely rest in the acquisition of land but more importantly in the promise of a "seed" as we see in Genesis 3:15. Which of course finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ our Lord. Remember God's promise to Rebekah, -

'Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.'

Jacob's descendance formed the tribe of Judah from which Jesus the Messiah would come, the King of all kings. Esau's descendance became known as the Edomite's and from the area where they settled would come another king, king Herod.

From Isaac death verse 21 of Hebrews 11 moves us to his son Jacob's death and his faith at that time.

Jacob's Faith.

By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. (11:21)

Jacob's life was like his father's in many ways. It was up and down. Sometimes he walked by faith and sometimes he stumbled by sight. He had times of great faith and times of fear and anxiety. He bargained with God on occasion (Genesis 28:20-21) and on other occasions he readily acknowledged God's blessing (Genesis 31:5). He reverently praised the Lord when he had the dream of the heavenly ladder (Genesis 28:16-17), and once he was so intent on receiving God's blessing that he wrestled with Him all night (Genesis 32:24-26). But the verse is centred in Genesis 48 which was the final days of Jacob's life.

Unlike his father, Jacob did not try to circumvent God's plan for his heirs. Joseph, though younger than all his brothers except Benjamin, was the chosen son to bless, just as Jacob, though younger, was chosen above Esau. In fact Joseph received a double blessing, in that his

two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were both blessed; although again the younger son, Ephraim, received the greater blessing (48:19). Consequently, instead of only one tribe descending from Joseph, as with his brothers, two tribes (often referred to as half-tribes) descended from him.

Jacob enjoyed only the first 17 years of Joseph his favourite son, and the last 17 years of his own life. As he was dying, he got up, leaning on his staff and blessed his son through his two grandsons.

"Then Israel [Jacob's new name] said to Joseph, 'Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I give you one portion more than your brothers'" (48:21-22).

Once again, what was never possessed was passed on in faith. Jacob died as a man of faith. What is interesting is that Jacob worshiped the Lord to the end of his life. He lifted himself up to worship God, frail and dependant on God. He didn't have a perfect record, yes, he compromised and even deceived, but here we see that he really did believe God, he really did believe God's promise which was about the land and the seed, to the very end.

It is very interesting, and a part that holds a real blessing for me when I thought about it, when Joseph brought his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to be blessed by Jacob. We read of the account in Genesis 48 starting at verse 5. Joseph brought them in, putting the older son Manasseh at Jacob's right side (a place of honour) and Ephraim the younger one on the left-hand side. Joseph brought them in order of his choice and in accordance with the custom of the time to receive a very important blessing for the reason which I have stated. When the two sons stood before him, Israel crossed his hand on purpose as directed by the Lord and gave the blessing to the younger.

I want you to take in that scene in your mind's eye, and without stretching the point too much, think about another Cross. It replaced the old covenant with the new one. It is at this Cross where the old nature is dealt a blow and the new nature is blessed. It is the new nature that receives the blessing and the promises that God has made to us through His Son our Saviour. It is because of the finished work on this cross that we have become joint heirs with Christ and have been grafted into the vine of God's family. It is because of this cross, we

are the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob and we have been blessed by their descendant, the seed spoken of in ancient times. Everything that Jacob said concerning his children came to pass. God gave them a peek into the future so they could see the future and you know he has done the same for us. We can go to His word as we can get just a glimpse of our future in the Bible of the land we are going too. Is that not amazing!

It took years for the proud, self-sufficient, and stubborn Jacob to be broken, but in the end, he died in faith but in a foreign land. Yes, he was in Egypt due to the famine but he knew that he didn't belong there, just like Joseph, which leads us to verse 22.

Joseph's Faith.

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones. (11:22).

Unlike Isaac and Jacob, Joseph stands out for the right reasons. In fact, he is one of the very few which the bible never records anything bad about. Though he was hated by his brothers and sold into slavery, he trusted and obeyed God. Amid many temptations and hardships, while completely separated from his family in a pagan foreign land, he trusted and obeyed God.

Joseph spent all of his adult life in Egypt. Though a fourth-generation heir of the promise, he could not claim even to have sojourned in the Promised Land, much less to have inherited it. It had been more than two hundred years since God made the initial covenant with Abraham. More than two hundred years of promise, and no fulfilment in sight. In fact, by the time of Joseph's death, none of Abraham's descendants lived in the Promised Land at all because of the famine in Canaan. Once Joseph had made himself known to his brothers, he brought them and his father to Egypt. Jacob was carried back to Canaan after he died, and Joseph wanted his bones to be buried there also. If he could not inherit the land, at least the land could "inherit" him.

Why was this so important? Because Joseph knew the promises that God gave his family and he knew that Egypt was not his final destination. If Egypt is a typology for the world, then surely, we can be more like Joseph and remember that this is not our final destination. When the children of Jacob entered Egypt, they had the best of everything even

the choices of land. No doubt, some may be forgiven that they had arrived into the promise land. It could not be better that they had it at the beginning. Joseph was second to Pharaoh. They had full and plenty, but despite that, it was not the land of promise. The world, as we see it, can and does hold many attractions. It can draw you away from the plan and promises of God. It can make them look as if the promises will never come to pass.

But the world is not our home, no matter the privileges or lack of them, here below. We are not meant to settle down here, we are only pilgrims and strangers passing through. Joseph did die there but did not remain there. Joseph wanted his children to remember the promises, not only of taking his bones back to the promise land, but for them to remember all of God's promises, including the promised seed. It was not until the Exodus that Joseph's bones were actually taken to Canaan (Exodus 13:19). His heart and his hope had always been there. He had to look ahead to see the promise, yet he saw it clearly and confidently.

"I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob"
(Genesis 50:24).

While he was making his brothers swear to take his bones back to Canaan, he repeated the assuring words of faith, "*God will surely take care of you*" (v. 25).

Out of these three patriarchs, Joseph probably had the most reason to fall behind even walk away from his faith. He was hated, he was humiliated, he was humbled, he had experienced the worst of humanity but he gave all those horrific experiences to God, and God honour him. Living by faith is not always easy, in fact we are guaranteed that there will be trials and difficulties but we are also guaranteed that God promises will be fulfilled.

What did all these three men have in common? They all had knowledge of the promises God had given them, down through Abraham. They all received a prophetic vision and they all had a clear choice to believe God, and His promises.

Isaac knew God had a different plan than what he would have naturally chosen, Jacob had more failures recorded about him than his good times, but in the end they all, in the face of death, believed God and by faith passed on the promises. Their faith had sometimes wavered in life, but it was strong and confident in death.

We will have ups and downs, Jesus told us we will; but just as these patriarchs reminded their children of God's promises, surely, we are encouraged to remind our children, and our children's children. In the end they worshiped God, and it is not just about how we run our race but how our race ends, how are we going to do it? Will we be crawling and moaning that we are going over the final stage, will we be dragging the flag, cause it's a bit too heavy a burden or we are bit embarrassed so the flag is folded up under the arm, or will be racing forward flying the flag that we have we waving throughout the race, absolutely excited, cheering on the other contenders? Are we flying that flag of Faith faithfully? These verses remind us of many things, and it gives us a picture of our faith, and what we really believe about our future.

We as believers today are spiritually privileged people. We too have received Divine knowledge. We too have a choice to accept the promise, the plan and throw in our lot with the Person of Jesus. We need to choose to walk as pilgrims through this world on our way home. It is a life changing exercise, that we need to do daily. We know who holds the future and who holds our hand. May the Lord give us the grace to believe and behave as we are meant to as God's children.

Amen.