

Hebrews 11:20-22 "Persevere To The End, As God Preserves You To The End"

We begin this morning by focusing on three individuals at a time in their lives when they were about to leave this world and meet their God. The promises given to them by the Lord, and their acceptance of them by faith, were about to come to fruition.

HEB 11:20-22 "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. 21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones."

For many years they were forced to live in a physical world with promises tied to this world and yet what we see is that those promises were but a taste of what the ultimate promises God had for them, which were future in nature.

Verses 20 and 21 deal with two men already mentioned in verse 9 of our text.

HEB 11:9-10 "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

The promise given to Abraham is the same promise given to Abraham's son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob. That promise was one which would find its ultimate fulfillment, not in this world, but in the next with our Creator. This is why verse 10 implies that not only did Abraham look forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God., but also Isaac and Jacob. And they too received it by faith, and like Abraham, it was accounted to them as righteousness.

The third person in our text in verse 22 is also related to Isaac and Jacob, being the son of Jacob, Joseph. We'll get to him this morning as well. But first I want you to notice something about all three of these men. Verses 20 through 22 are dealing with these three at the very end of their lives.

The Holy Spirit has shown us that they were given promises in this life by God and they received them by faith. And now, we see that their faith took them through to the very end as the Lord enabled them to persevere. They were not fair-weather believers. The promises given to them by God were not things they embraced for only short season in their lives.

No, they believed God from the start and they would believe God to the end until they went home to be with Him. Again, we must understand that they were human and they had times of doubt, but the faith they had was a genuine faith given to them by God, and like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we too will be able to go the distance in faith because of God's work in our lives, because "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (PHI 2:13)

Remember too, that it is Jesus "who is the author and the perfecter of our faith..." (Heb.12:2), just as He was with the saints of old. If we are in Christ we do not need to fear if we'll make it home to be with our Lord. We should, however, never take such an assurance for granted if our lives are proving fruit which is not Christ-like. It's not just how we start, it's how we end the pilgrimage. If we start by faith, we must end by faith, as that faith in Christ enables us to persevere in love and obedience to our great God.

And so we come to our text this morning.

HEB 11:20 "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future."

You'll notice here that nothing is said of Isaac's life; simply that at the end of it he did something by faith. Of course it's implied that if he had faith at the end, he certainly had faith prior to this as well.

When we go to the end of Isaac's life in GEN 27:1 we read, "When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son...."

Evidently, Isaac was near blind at the end of his life. Arthur W. Pink suggests that maybe this is more instructive than at first glance. He suggests that not mere physical blindness is the only thing Isaac had a problem with, but spiritual blindness as well. It's interesting that we read in DEU 34:7 "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone."

It seems a strange thing to say of man about to leave this world; "his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone." Jesus said in MAT 6:22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light." Sometimes our spiritual eyes can become dim and it makes it hard to see clearly and live by the faith it takes to see clearly.

Isaac had such a problem. Though his life was predominantly one of faith in God, at the very end of his life he did something which was contrary to faith.

GEN 27:1-8 "When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." "Here I am," he answered. 2 Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. 3 Now then, get your weapons - your quiver and bow - and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. 4 Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die." 5 Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, 7 'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.' 8 Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you:"

Of course what Rebekah told Jacob was to pretend that he was Esau. He put some animal skin on his arms which gave the feel of being hairy, which of course Esau was. The whole plan was to make sure Jacob got the blessing.

People have wondered why would Rebekah do such a thing? Was it that Jacob was her favorite and she wanted him to get the blessing instead of Esau? Well, in some respects Rebekah did have a special place in her heart for Jacob.

GEN 25:27-28 "The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. 28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

But, this is not entirely the reason Rebekah wants Jacob to get the blessing. Keep in mind that the blessing of the father was a very special honor that went to the eldest son who, in this case, was Esau by a matter of minutes, since we're told Jacob had a hold of his brother's heel as he came out of the womb.

The blessing was a special way of passing the baton to the head of the next generation, who would be given the privilege of carrying on his father's legacy. The question is, what is Isaac's legacy which he was to pass on to Esau or Jacob? The answer is, the same legacy given to his father Abraham, which was the promise given by God that he would be the father of many nations and in whose seed the Messiah would come.

God is the One who chooses through whom the seed will come. This is where we have to go back to a promise given to Rebekah by God.

GEN 25:21-23 "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

God had told Rebekah that the younger, in this case Jacob, would be God's choice to carry on the spiritual legacy of Isaac. The means Rebekah used in tricking Isaac in giving the blessing to Jacob may be questionable, but the faith of Rebekah is certainly evident as she made sure God's will would be done according to what God promised many years ago.

And this is where Isaac's faith grew weak. Isaac must have known that it was Jacob who should be receiving the blessing at God's direction many years before. Instead, he tells Esau to go out and get him his favorite meal and when he returns he'll get the blessing. Isaac was thinking of his stomach and willing to give the blessing based on his natural appetite rather than on the spiritual promise.

A.W. Pink points out the "Low state into which a child of God may get. Isaac presents unto us a solemn warning of the evil consequences which follow failure to judge and refuse our natural appetites. If we do not mortify our members which are upon earth, if we do not abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul, then the fine edge of our spiritual life will be blunted, and fine gold will become dim. If we live to eat, instead of eating to live, our spiritual vision is bound to be defective. Discernment is a by-product, the fruit and result of the denying of self, and following Christ."

Isaac's sight was dim in his old age, but his spiritual sight was as well, in some respects. Rebekah sought to fix what Isaac was about to mess up, even though her tactics could not be seen entirely in the light of faith either. But we're told in HEB 11:20 "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future." How can this be?

Well, we need only go to Scripture to see. The natural inclination of Isaac after realizing that he was tricked might have been to take the blessing back or to be upset with Rebekah and Jacob. What we read is not the case. After Esau came back with the food the hoax was discovered.

GEN 27:33,37 "Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him - and indeed he will be blessed!" 37 Isaac answered Esau, "I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?"

Isaac realized what he had done and yet he does not take the blessing back as he confirms what was told to Rebekah many years before, that the older will serve the younger, as Isaac says, "I have made him lord over you". By faith Isaac stays with his choice. But by faith Isaac also blesses Esau in a way that sees the future for him, as well as Jacob.

GEN 27:38-40 Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!" Then Esau wept aloud. 39 His father Isaac answered him, "Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above." 40 You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck."

Living by sight can produce turbulent times when God tells us that living by faith is what brings peace. Of course, in the end God is still sovereign and will bring us to that place where His promises will be found true in our lives, by His grace and strength, as we're enabled to walk by faith.

Now Jacob carries the mantle and what are we told of him?

HEB 11:21 "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff."

This is a picture of Jacob at the end of his life who is also leaving this world in his God-given faith. He now blesses his son Joseph, by blessing the sons of Joseph. Keep in mind that Joseph has been second in command only to the Pharaoh in Egypt.

The sons of Jacob, who are now known as the sons of Israel, since God changed Jacob's name to Israel, would certainly include Joseph. What's interesting about this is that Joseph, as with his father, was given a promise by God that the elders would serve the younger.

GEN 37:5-8 "Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." 8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said."

God had chosen Joseph to be the one through whom the nation of Israel would be preserved in Egypt and through whom the seed of the Messiah would also be preserved through his older brother Judah who led up to the line of David. And of course it is through this Davidic line that we see our Lord Jesus Christ coming into this world.

MAT 1:1 "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the *son of David, the son of Abraham*:..."

Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph and regards them as his own. But in faith he blesses as God has led him to bless.

GEN 48:13-19 "And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. 14 But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 the Angel who has delivered me from all harm - may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth." 17 When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was

displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations."

In an act of worship before God Jacob approaches the Lord in thanks and gratitude for the life of his son Joseph and the lives of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

HEB 11:21 "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff."

To the very end Jacob, by faith, worshiped the Lord as he relied on God's sustaining power and promises. Jacob knew God was the One who was faithful and would be there after he left this earth, and he could know that God would be faithful to be with his sons as they too must continue to live by faith. As A.W. Pink puts it: "Ah to die by faith, we must (necessarily) live by faith."

But this faith went beyond what Jacob saw for Joseph's sons.

GEN 47:29-30 "When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried." "I will do as you say," he said."

Jacob was about to enter into his rest with the Lord. He would realize to some extent the eternal city whose architect and builder is God, but he desired that his final resting place in this earth be that of the promise given him and his fathers in the land of promise, Canaan. And per his request Joseph and his brothers buried their father.

GEN 50:13 "They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre (about 30 miles south of Jerusalem), which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field."

Abraham, whose faith in God was reckoned to him as righteousness, was whom Jacob wanted to be buried next to in the promised land. Even in his death, Jacob is seen as one identified with faith in the promises of God, even though they would yet be

future for the nation of Israel, who continued to stay in Egypt for many years to come.

But, as Jacob understood, Egypt was not where God had promised that the nation of Israel would ultimately reside. The nation would fulfill the promise given to Abraham, that they would reside in Canaan, what came to be known as the land of Israel.

This is why we read in HEB 11:22 "By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones."

Joseph was a man who had quite an interesting life. Born into the house of Jacob, he lived 17 years with his family. Suddenly, through hatred from his brothers, he was cast into slavery and finally ended up in Egypt. Pink comments: "Thirteen years in prison did not embitter him; being made lord over Egypt did not spoil him; evil examples all around did not corrupt him. O the mighty power of Divine grace to preserve its favored objects.....

.... But let the reader carefully bear in mind that, in his earliest years, Joseph had received a godly training! O how this ought to encourage Christian parents: do your part in faithfully teaching the children, and with God's blessing, it will abide with them, even though they move into a foreign land."

Joseph remembered the faithfulness of his God and even in pagan Egypt he walked with the Lord. And though his entire life was one of faith in God, the writer of Hebrews moves to the end of Joseph's life. Again, faith was seen active right up to the end of Joseph's life.

Does he encourage Israel to put their hope in the graciousness of the Pharaoh? No. As we learn in Scripture the Pharaoh, who was a friend of Joseph, died and other Pharaoh's came after Joseph's death who did not know him. What started out as a good relationship between two peoples ended in contempt as Israel grew strong and a subsequent Pharaoh was afraid they would align themselves with their warring neighbors and be a threat.

Security and peace in Egypt turned into captivity as they were prisoners and slaves of Egyptian rule. But, much time prior to this, Joseph saw with eyes of faith, and was assured of things he had hoped in. He had a strong conviction of things not seen, which were yet future.

By faith, as he was about to die, he gave instructions, as did his father Jacob, that his bones were to be buried in the Promised land.

GEN 50:22-26 "Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years 23 and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees. 24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." 25 And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." 26 So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt."

The faith of Joseph was demonstrated in action as he believed that God would bring them out of Egypt, just as He promised Abraham. Joseph spent some 93 years in Egypt and yet he never considered it home. His home was also that eternal city whose architect and builder is God. He knew Israel would be given a land of their own, but even so, it was not a land in this present cursed world Joseph ultimately looked to.

When Joseph's family came to Egypt, because of the famine, Joseph was in his late 30's or early 40's. (Gen.41:46,53,54) From the time Jacob, his father, came into Egypt, he knew his family would only be in Egypt for a limited time.

Joseph knew this because of his faith in the promises of God, which clearly foretold of Israel's slavery in Egypt and their coming out after a specified period of time. In fact, Joseph must have known that Israel's time of slavery was not indefinite because the promise was undoubtedly given to him by his father Jacob, who received it from his father Isaac, who received it from his father Abraham, who received it from God. Each man received it by faith.

When Abraham asked for a son to carry on his name God promised that he would have one. But then God told Abraham in GEN 15:13-15 ....., "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age."

Joseph looked to the future by faith and saw what God had promised. He was now living in that land which would enslave his people and this is one reason he encourages his brothers in Gen.50:24 ..... "But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

It could have been very disheartening to think that Israel's future was going to be bleak. Something like that would concern any of us, but faith came to bear on this promise as it saw another promise of hope.

GEN 15:13 ....., "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.

There was a limit put in place by God. What hope! God was personally involved and would not allow His people, whom He loved, to suffer indefinitely. Joseph might have been tempted to have a false sense of security during his lifetime, as things were still relatively good for Israel in Egypt, but he saw with spiritual eyes, both the warning and the blessing.

Joseph's hope was not in the wealth and comfort of Egypt, it was in his God and His promises. He lived by faith to the end looking forward to those promises fulfilled in the greatest city of all, the city of our great God in His very presence in heaven which will ultimately find its expression on the New Earth in the New Jerusalem.

You and I must live by the promises of God because, we too live in a type of Egypt, since we are pilgrims and strangers in this world who hates those who belong to the household of faith, because they first hated our Lord and Savior. But we must take our eyes off of Egypt and its momentary pleasures and comforts and, like Joseph, look to the promises.

It's being focused on the prize set before us. That prize is the eternal fellowship we have with our God. When our eyes are clear the rest of our bodies are full of light and we can shine for our Lord to His glory. But our focus can only be sustained through faith in the promises, and more important, in the One who Promises and loves us with an everlasting love.

We may wonder at times, 'Lord am I bound to have to suffer here in Egypt forever, with all of the attacks from the enemy trying to

bury me?' The Lord answers us, 'hold on to Me by faith to the very end, because I'm waiting for you there. Live for Me by faith today, and watch Me use you to bring others out of the spiritual wasteland of Egypt where bondage and slavery to sin only kill. I continue to give you hope through My sure promises.'

God has called us out and encourages us not to go back. But He gives us the strength to look to Him by faith for a better country even as our spiritual ancestors did.

HEB 11:16 "Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

We've been called to follow Christ. But as God encouraged his people in the past to look to Him by faith in His promises, He calls us to do the same, but there's one very important promise we must never forget, which is found in 1PE 5:10-11 ...."The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Stand firm to the end like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph who walked with eyes of faith, as they loved their God with all their hearts, souls, minds and strength. His grace is sufficient and He will never forsake or leave us.