
Faith in the Face of Death

Part 1

Hebrews 11:20-22

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”

INTRODUCTION:

- Hebrews 11
 - The theme—“*What true saving faith looks like*”
 - Paul is calling these unbelieving Hebrews who have been sitting on the wall of unbelief to embrace Christ by faith
 - They have been greatly exposed to the truth of Christ
 - And because they had set in unbelief for so long—Paul warns them that they were getting to a dangerous place of *falling away* and never returning again

- And thus their condemnation would be even greater—because they spurned what they knew was true

NOTE: Jesus even said that there would be a **greater condemnation** to people who died rejecting what they knew of Christ—than there would be for those who never heard.

Matthew 11:21-23—“*woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. (They will receive a lesser judgment than you will—because they had a lesser knowledge) 23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.”*

- So Paul’s pleading—is that they would not continue to sit in unbelief—but that they would enter into this new covenant—**BY FAITH**
- And so Paul tells them through this chapter—that this is nothing new
- That even their forefathers—stepped out by faith—embracing Christ whom they had never seen

NOTE: True saving faith is NOT SECRET faith. It doesn't remain in your heart and never come out in your life. Even James said that "*faith without works is dead.*" A faith that does not demonstrate itself in the life of a person is not genuine saving faith.

- **So Paul gives them the examples of people who demonstrated true saving faith**
 - He pointed to Abel—who by faith offered a sacrifice that was acceptable to God
 - He pointed to Enoch—who walked with God by faith
 - He pointed to Noah—who built an Ark by faith—and saved his family from the wrath of God's judgment
 - And last time we were in Hebrews—we looked at Abraham—who left his home by faith—awaiting God's promise of a seed and the inheritance of the land
- **But there is one thing that all of these patriarch's and forefathers have in common—that the Hebrews of Paul's day did not**
 - They died not having received the fulfillment of these promises
 - They were all looking to the coming of Christ—who would redeem men from their sins

Hebrews 11:13—"*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and*

were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"

Hebrews 11:39—"*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise*"

- **In some way, we could honestly say—that the faith of Israel's forefathers was greater faith than even what the faith of the Hebrews of Paul's day could ever be**
 - They saw the fulfillment of these promises
 - They saw that Christ has come
 - That he has paid for their sins
 - He did what no high priest could ever do—make His people right with God
 - He did what no sacrifice could ever do—remove the sins of the people forever
- **And yet with all of that knowledge—these Hebrews were still sitting on the wall of unbelief—trying so desperately to hang on to their Judaism**
- **They were afraid of truly stepping and embracing Christ**

NOTE: Paul wasn't telling them to do what even he himself had not done. Of course it was a huge step of faith. It was turning your back on everything that you had been taught—and embracing the new and living way that could only be found in Christ.

Philippians 3:4-9—"*Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof*

he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, **those I counted loss for Christ.** 8 Yea doubtless, and **I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:** for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and **do count them but dung,** that I may win Christ, 9 and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”

- **And so that is what Paul is calling these Hebrews to do—to count their “old life” as dung—and enter into the true righteousness of God—that only comes by faith in Christ**
- **True Saving Faith**
 - **One of the marks that Paul points out that SHOULD be evident in life of those who possess true saving faith—is DYING GRACE**
 - **Every one of these people mentioned demonstrated their faith in the face of death**

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his

staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”

- **Isaac demonstrated such faith**
- **Jacob demonstrated that faith**
- **And Joseph demonstrated that faith**

NOTE: What this passages seems to be indicating is that true saving faith—continues all the way to the end. As Paul previously said to the Hebrews...

Hebrews 10:39—“*we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*”

True saving faith endures to the very end.

Matthew 10:22—“*And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*”

Psalm 37:37—“*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.*”

- **The upright (saved) will end the same way he started (strong in faith)**
- **And that’s what Paul shows us in this passage**

CIT: How Did Israel’s Patriarchal Forefathers Demonstrate Their Faith in the Face of Death?

I. Isaac's Faith Foresaw the Future on an Individual Level (vs. 20)—“*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*”

A. The Historical Character of Isaac

1. Isaac the Son Abraham

a. Abraham was an idolater whom God called out of his home of the Ur of the Chaldees—to a land he did not know

- i. The land of Canaan
- ii. A land filled with pagan idolatry

“Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, 20 and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, 21 and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

b. God told Abraham that He would give Abraham and his Seed that land

- i. The only problem with that is that Abraham didn't have any seed
 - Though his name actually meant *Father of Many*—he wasn't a father
- ii. His wife was barren

- One of the very first things we are told about Sarah—is that she was barren

iii. God made Abraham wait 25 years (when he was 100 and his wife was 90)

iv. And at the point in which their **physical reproductive abilities were dead**—God miraculously stepped in and gave them the ability to have this child

v. This child was the beginning of the promise—that God gave to Abraham 25 years before—in seeing it come to pass

vi. But it wasn't the fulfillment of the promise

vii. In fact, Abraham would never see that promise come to pass

Hebrews 11:13—Abraham “*died in faith, not having received the promises*”

- He never became the possessor of that land
- He never saw the coming of the One who would bless all nations
- He never—in his lifetime—saw the fulfillment of those promises

2. Yet, Abraham passed that promise of hope down to his son—Isaac

NOTE: And that hope continued to be passed down for hundreds of years—until Christ finally came.

And that’s what Paul is pointing to; that Isaac passed that hope down to Jacob. Then Jacob passed that hope down to the sons of Joseph. And Joseph passed it down to the nation of Israel.

You see that hope being passed down on an individual level. Then it is being passed down on a tribal level. And finally, it is passed down on a national level.

And what makes that hope survive, and continue to be passed down from generation to generation—is faith.

Paul’s point is that true faith never dies—even when the **fulfillment of the promises of God are not yet seen.**

NOTE: In all honesty, no one has truly seen the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham. We’ve only seen part of it come to pass. And that was when the Seed of came (Christ). But the promise of the inheritance is still yet unfulfilled. **That won’t be fulfilled until Christ comes again.**

And yet faith doesn’t have to see all the promises be fulfilled to believe. That doesn’t even qualify as faith.

Hebrews 11:1—“*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*”

Romans 8:24-25—“*For we are saved by **hope**: but hope that **is seen is not hope**: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? 25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.*”

Faith doesn’t have to wait for the fulfillment of God’s promises to truly believe. And faith that is genuine faith—is alright with even going to grave, never seeing the promises come to pass.

B. The Blessing Passed Down (vs. 20)—“*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*”

1. The divided family of Isaac

Genesis 25:20-21—“*and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. 21 And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived*”

a. Isaac’s marriage with a barren wife

i. Isaac took Rebekah to be his wife at the age of 40

ii. And just like Sarah—immediately we find out that she is barren

- iii. And so Isaac seeks the Lord to open up her womb so that she would be able to have children
- iv. And the Lord heard his prayer—and not only opened her womb—but gave her twins
- v. And this is where it seem that Isaac and Rebekah began to be divided

b. The division starts

- i. At the time of Rebekah’s pregnancy—she began to be greatly pained with what was going on inside her womb

Genesis 25:22—“*And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord.*”

- So she inquired of the Lord about what she was going through
- This struggle in her womb
- So the Lord answered her

Vs. 23—“*Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.*”

- What was going on is that she was pregnant with twin
- And they were struggling within her womb (fighting)
- And then God reveals to her a prophecy about her children
 - Both of her children will be the heads of two different nations
 - One nation will be stronger than the other
 - And He said that the one that will be stronger—is the younger

“the elder shall serve the younger”

- Rebekah received that prophecy with joy
- But the indication of the text—when Isaac heard that prophecy—he rejected it
- He chose rather to love (Esau) their firstborn
- And Rebekah loved (Jacob) the second-born
- This became a major source of division in their family

- Isaac wanted Esau to get the blessing (the promise that God gave to Abraham)
- And Rebekah wanted Jacob to inherit the promise

NOTE: One thing you'll notice about Isaac. Instead of looking at the promise that God gave to his father Abraham and that was passed down to him—as a spiritual blessing that would come through the Messiah, he carnalized it.

He seemed to be focused on the blessing through the eyes of a carnal mind—as we will see.

ii. And it wasn't just the marriage that was divided (because of Isaac's carnality)—it passed down to the whole family

- Not only was Isaac and Rebekah divided
- So were Jacob and Esau

iii. The acts of their division

- The first act we see is between Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25:27-34—“*And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain*

man, dwelling in tents. 28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: 30 and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.”

- The two boys are completely different in nature
- Jacob is a home body
- And Esau is a hunter—“*a man of the field*”
- And one day Esau comes from the field and smells Jacob food that he was cooking
- And he begins to implore Jacob for some of his pottage—even exaggerating that he was so hungry—he was about to die

- So Jacob—who knew that his mom and dad were divided over who was to get the blessing—saw this as a grand opportunity to secure it for himself
- He tells Esau—“*Sell me your birthright—and you can have my pottage*”
- Esau’s response

*“Behold, I am at the point to die: and **what profit shall this birthright do to me?**”*

NOTE: We really see the nature of Esau, when it comes to the promised line. He sees no spiritual value in what his father wants (against God’s will) for him to have. He does not have a high value for it at all.

This man (Esau) should be in the line of that promise?

Now I will say, that Jacob’s no saint either. But it just goes to show you how carnal they had become about the promised blessing God had in store for them (that would come through Abraham’s Seed).

- The 2nd is between Mom and Dad (Isaac and Rebekah)
 - This is the point in which Paul is

referring to in our passage

- One day Isaac secretly calls Esau to his side—and tells him that he is about to die—and this would be the day that he would be passing down the blessing (the promise that God gave to his father Abraham)
- And so he tells his son—before he dies—he would like to eat one last meal of Esau’s venison

NOTE: You really see the carnality being played out. Isaac’s only interested in securing the promise to Esau—and not because he firmly believes Esau is the one who should have it. He only wants him to have it because he loves Esau’s venison.

How carnal can he be?

And so he plans this secret meeting—in which he is going to bestow that blessing upon Esau.

- But Isaac didn’t know that Rebekah was

listening in to this
private conversations

Genesis 27:5—“*And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son.*”

- So she immediately went into action—to make sure that Isaac’s plan wouldn’t work

Genesis 27:6-10—“*And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, 7 Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death. 8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. 9 Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: 10 and thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.*”

- Jacob’s response:

Genesis 27:11-12—“*And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: 12 my father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.*”

- Mom is willing to take the heat...

Genesis 27:13—“*And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them*”

- The plan:
 - Get some goats from the flock
 - Cook them up—to taste like venison
 - Use the fur to make skins that are hairy (so to feel like Esau)
 - Wear some of Esau’s garments (so to smell like Esau)
 - And get the blessing for yourself

NOTE: I just want to make this note—Just because God planned the line of promise to continue through Jacob and not Esau—did not mean that Rebekah and Jacob were right in what they did.

It is never right to do wrong—so that you can get the right results.

- The plan ends up working out
 - Jacob comes in
 - Deceives his father that he is Esau
 - Deceives him with the goat meat
 - Deceives him with the goat skin
 - Deceives him with Esau's clothes
 - So Isaac passes his blessing upon Jacob

Genesis 27:28-29—“*therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: 29 let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.*”

NOTE: Notice the carnal viewpoint that Isaac has about the blessing. It's not about the Messiah. It's not about salvation that will come to all people through his line. All it amounts to is material blessing

Fatness of the earth; plenty of corn and wine; people serve you; nations bow down to you; be lord over your brethren.

That doesn't sound like the promise that God gave to Abraham. That's how carnal Isaac had become.

QUESTION: *Someone is going to ask, “How in the world did Isaac, by faith, bless Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”*

If we look at the rest of the text in Genesis—we can see how something changes Isaac's heart.

Genesis 27:30-32—“*And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31 And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me.*

32 And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau.

33 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.”

- It's beginning to dawn on Isaac—that his plan to resist God didn't work

- He wanted Esau to receive the blessing

- But instead—Jacob got the blessing
- And it was at that point—when he finally realized what had happened—that he accepted the will of God for Jacob

“he shall be blessed”

- Isaac wasn’t going to be able to resist God—even though Jacob and his mother got the blessing in a wrong way
- If Isaac had spoken those words over Esau rather than Jacob—it wouldn’t have changed God’s plan for Jacob to be the link in the chain of God’s purpose
- Isaac couldn’t override God’s will
- And at the last—**he accepted God’s will**

And by faith *“blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”*

NOTE: There is one thing that we need to point out about Isaac that I think we can overlook. Even though Isaac responded to God’s purpose with carnality—he never got to the place where he stopped believing in the promise God gave to Abraham.

It’s just he wanted that promise to be for Esau—and not Jacob.

CONCLUSION:

- ✚ **Isaac might be a poor example of a person of faith—as several of the patriarchs are**
- ✚ **But Paul’s purpose in pointing Isaac out is so that these Hebrews see that what God is wanting them to do—step out by faith and embrace Christ—is not a foreign concept**
- ✚ **The Hebrews forefathers all were looking for the promise of the Messiah**
- ✚ **And even though they did not see the blessings come to pass in their lifetime—they still believed that He would indeed come**
- ✚ **And these Hebrews of Paul’s day—needed to join into that line of faith before they became so hardened—that it would become impossible to truly believe**
- ✚ **Faith is not based on seeing—but on hope in God’s promises**
- ✚ **It is believing the God is faithful to keep His promises no matter what**

John 20:29—“*Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*”

ILLUSTRATION:

In college I was asked to prepare a lesson to teach my speech class. We were to be graded on our creativity and ability to drive home a point in a memorable way. The title of my talk was, "The Law of the Pendulum." I spent 20 minutes carefully teaching the physical principle that governs a swinging pendulum. The law of the pendulum is: A pendulum can never return to a point higher than the point from which it was released. Because of friction and gravity, when the pendulum returns, it will fall short of its original release point. Each time it swings it makes less and less of an arc, until finally it is at rest. This point of rest is called the state of equilibrium, where all forces acting on the pendulum are equal.

I attached a 3-foot string to a child's toy top and secured it to the top of the blackboard with a thumbtack. I pulled the top to one side and made a mark on the blackboard where I let it go. Each time it swung back I made a new mark. It took less than a minute for the top to complete its swinging and come to rest. When I finished the demonstration, the markings on the blackboard proved my thesis. I then asked how many people in the room BELIEVED the law of the pendulum was true. All of my classmates raised their hands, so did the teacher. He started to walk to the front of the room thinking the class was over. In reality it had just

begun. Hanging from the steel ceiling beams in the middle of the room was a large, crude but functional pendulum (250 pounds of metal weights tied to four strands of 500-pound test parachute cord.).

I invited the instructor to climb up on a table and sit in a chair with the back of his head against a cement wall. Then I brought the 250 pounds of metal up to his nose. Holding the huge pendulum just a fraction of an inch from his face, I once again explained the law of the pendulum he had applauded only moments before, "If the law of the pendulum is true, then when I release this mass of metal, it will swing across the room and return short of the release point. Your nose will be in no danger." After that final restatement of this law, I looked him in the eye and asked, "Sir, do you believe this law is true?" There was a long pause. Huge beads of sweat formed on his upper lip and then weakly he nodded and whispered, "Yes." I released the pendulum. It made a swishing sound as it arced across the room. At the far end of its swing, it paused momentarily and started back. I never saw a man move so fast in my life. He literally dived from the table. Deftly stepping around the still-swinging pendulum, I asked the class, "Does he believe in the law of the pendulum?"

The students unanimously answered, "NO!"