

## Hebrews 11v20-22

8<sup>th</sup> November 2020 am Hill and Arcadia am live streamed

### “By faith... forward looking

When I first starting looking at these verses I was surprised by what the author of Hebrews **selected to illustrate** the faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

I would have thought the highlight of faith in **the life of Isaac** was his willingness to allow his father to tie him to the altar.

And the highlight of faith in **the life of Jacob** his dream of the ladder or the time he wrestled with the Lord.

**As for Joseph**, my thoughts of the highlights of his faith is when he ran from the temptation from Potiphar’s wife or the way he served in prison or his refusal to be bitter and forgive his brothers.

But as always God has **a specific message** here - seen in the author’s selection of incidents from each of these men coming to the end of their lives.

In Isaac’s case, the incident happened when he was very old, feeble, and blind. In the case of the other two men, the author states specifically that they were dying.

Reference to the faith of these 3 men, as each of them sense the **time of their death** is approaching, is intended to be an encouragement to all believers in the face of death.

Don’t forget that some of the recipients of this letter were **wavering in their faith**. They were contemplating a return to Judaism and turning their back on Jesus.

As Christians they were being persecuted (*10:32-34*); and so death from persecution was a real possibility. And then as in all communities the presence of older people inevitably means the reality of people dying.

Under the threat of persecution and death the Hebrew Christians, like many of us, need to be encouraged **as we face...**

## 1 The final enemy

Unless the Lord Jesus returns, you and I will face **the dreaded event** of your soul been wrenched from your body; just like the saints paraded before us in *Hebrews 11:13 These all died...*

*2 Corinthians 4:16 ...our outer self is wasting away...*

*2 Corinthians 5:1 ...the tent that is our earthly home (will be) is destroyed...*

That day will draw near – sooner than we may realize; for some that day is drawing near. There is a word from God here **to encourage you** as you see the terminus point of your life fast approaching?

**Matthew Henry:** *Though the grace of faith is of universal value throughout our lives, yet it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its great work to do at the last, to help believers 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, for the conviction and establishment of all that attend them in their dying moments.*

**A W Pink:** *He who enabled His people to exercise faith during the vigour of life, will not withdraw His quickening power during the weakness of death.*

In these verses before us God has provided **3 examples of faith** in the final crisis and conflict.

He is here **giving assurance** to fearful and doubting and struggling Christians, that He, who has begun a good work in them, will certainly sustain and complete that work.

God will **not forsake** His own when support is desperately needed in that final stretch of the race.

As Isaac, Jacob and Joseph faced death, they had **not seen the promises that God** had made near fulfilment.

In fact their circumstances in the world around them seemed **contrary to their fulfilment**. These men had lived all of their lives hearing about and believing in God's promises, but God had not yet delivered.

Even so, they all died with their faith and focus **on things to come**, believing that God would keep His word.

By listing these three men and identifying acts of faith in the fading days of their lives helps us **better appreciate** and **practically live out** God given faith to navigate our way through death to overcome the final enemy.

## **2 The durability of God given faith**

Advertisers tell us that certain batteries are **more durable** than others; and of course that may be so, but we all know that at some point in time all batteries will fail.

But unlike even Duracell batteries which do eventually fail, **genuine faith endures** to the end of life. We will see demonstrated in this passage that genuine faith is wrought by God and therefore durable.

Genuine faith is not present and then fading and gone. You and I need to be encouraged to see that...**A W Pink** *"a God given faith ... is not only sufficient to enable the feeblest saint to overcome the solicitation of the flesh, the attractions of the world, and the temptations of Satan, but it is also able to give him a triumphant passage through death"*.

In the words of **Jesus in John 10:28** *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

Look with me to be encouraged and see **the durability of faith**, even in face of death, in the life of a man...

## 2.1 Who got so many things wrong

God had **told Rebekah** in *Genesis 25:23* *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."*

We can assume that she had shared this word from God with Isaac, and yet when it came to the crunch **he ignored God's** clear ordering of things.

His mistake was to **confuse God's blessing** with his own emotions and preferences. Knowing that the older will serve the younger, he never the less goes ahead following what was normal practice and does not put aside natural feelings.

Isaac is determined to give the **patriarchal blessing** to Esau and not Jacob.

The saga unfolds with him then becoming the **victim of deception**. His wife, Rebekah, and his son, Jacob, cooperate in a scheme to trick Isaac into thinking Jacob is Esau.

Isaac **smells a rat** but in the end falls for the deception and proceeds to give Jacob the patriarchal blessing.

Although he found out that he had been the victim of deceit and trickery, Isaac was unwilling to withdraw what he had said about **the respective futures** of his sons, Jacob and Esau.

It is as if at that moment he takes off his blinkers and puts his emotions aside realizing / remembering that Jacob and not Esau was **God's chosen instrument** for the future.

While Esau would enjoy some temporal blessings, the **covenant promises** given to Abraham would be fulfilled through Jacob's line; bringing us to the one liner...

*Hebrews 11:20* *By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.*

Even though he got so many things wrong in the end, by faith, he was able **to look ahead / forward** to the things promised and not yet received.

This is the difference **genuine faith** makes.

Where there is **an absence** of genuine faith in men and women the tendency is to spend their time and energy looking back to what has been. Their lives are consumed by looking backwards in the rear view mirror; at regrets, mistakes, people, joys, successes, sorrows... of the past.

But where there is **the presence** of genuine faith – even when it has been obscured by getting many things wrong – that faith does not evaporate. It shows itself and enables the believer to look forward to all the unfolding promises of God.

Look with me, at another example, to be encouraged to see the **durability of faith**, even in the face of death, in the life of a man...

## 2.2 Who repeatedly messed up

The act of faith, that is **singled out for mention** is taken from the end of his life.

*Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.*

But that which had **gone before** cannot be ignored.

In spite of having **believed the promises** of God at the outset of his career he repeatedly acted in devious ways.

We have already seen how **underhanded** he operated by taking advantage of Esau's moral weakness by offering him a very low price to purchase his birth right.

And later on **to conspire** with his mother to deceive Isaac and steel the blessing Isaac intended for Esau.

In *Genesis 31* we see how his actions **strained his relationship** with Laban, his father in law; when Laban catches up to Jacob after he had secretly fled from his father in law's home...

*Genesis 31:26 Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword?"*

It is a well-known fact that he **provoked his children** to jealousy by favouring Joseph; that leading to the brothers scheming to eliminate their young brother from home and family.

Once again we see that even though he badly and repeatedly messed up, his faith had never evaporated. Once again the **selected incident** reported is that...

*Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.*

In the closing moments of his life he is aware of the presence of God; going on to predict the future of each boy. Jacob **displays his certainty** as to how the purposes of God would proceed through each one.

He only had a few moments left on earth, yet he was still **looking forward**. God was a reality and His word was sure.

There is another example, to be encouraged to see the **durability of faith**, even in the face of death, in the life of a man...

### 2.3 Faith in the life of a man who had the world at his feet

During the course of his life, Joseph has passed through a great variety of experiences. One author describes **the progression of his life** as being from the pit to the pinnacle.

And yet even though he ends his life as second in charge of Egypt, he is his dying days **forward looking**.

He could so easily have been consumed with **all that he had accomplished** even though his brothers sold him off as a slave or even though he had been unjustly thrown into prison...

Like many elderly men and women **his preoccupation** could so have been reminiscing about his successes in clamouring to the top, ending up as a man who as it were had the world at his feet.

Jesus clearly stated that wealth can be **a huge obstacle** in living a life of faith...

*Matthew 19:24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."*

But not so with Joseph as he was **a man of genuine faith**; although there was no sign of it at the time, he could see the coming Exodus that God had promised that the Israelites would eventually leave Egypt.

Joseph had not lived to see it, but he knew it was **definitely going to happen**. This being so he gave instructions about what they were to do with his bones; not to be left in Egypt but to have them buried in the Promised land.

*Hebrews 11:22 By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.*

Like the others, Joseph lived and died **without seeing all** that God had promised, but this did not make him cynical, or fill him with doubts and hesitations.

What God had promised would certainly happen. Even though humanly speaking Joseph 'had it all'; he did not spend his time bragging about what he had achieved or all that he owned.

Instead as a man of faith he was **forward** looking to all that God would still do in fulfilment of His promises.

### Conclusion

We see the faith of these 3 men commended because at the end of their lives **they rely** on the plan and will and promises of God. Their faith is commended because of

because they trust the promises of God and surrender to the will of God.

Jesus did that as well. He did so in the Garden and on the cross. By faith, He surrendered Himself to **the will and plan of God**. By faith, He went the Father's way rather than man's way.

So look beyond Isaac, Jacob and Joseph to Jesus. **Look to Jesus** the author and perfecter of our faith, *Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

**But don't wait** until you are old and dying. Right now, today, live by faith.

There is nothing as sure as God's word and so there is no need to give in to pessimism, despair or apostasy...

**The future** is always as bright as the promises of God. Are your views of the future governed by what God has said?