

Title: "Living Faith: Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph"

Text: Hebrews 11:20-22; Genesis 50:1-21

We are continuing in our series on "Living Faith in 3D,"
-and last week we had a chance to hear a 21st Century
testimony of what living faith looks like right here in our
own backyard, down in New Bedford, MA.

Sarah Terrell, who was here sharing that story with us, said,
"We are not really doing anything. God is just opening
doors and we are walking through them."

My friends, that is a pretty good description of how living faith
works in every age.

-God shows up and invites us to follow. He opens doors, and
we walk through.

-And it's His showing up in our lives that convinces us that
walking through the door he opens is the best thing we can
do...so we do.

-We walk through them into this adventure we are calling,
"Living Faith in 3D."

Today, we come back to the Letter to the Hebrews, and the
writer in chapter 11 directs our attention to Isaac, Jacob,
and Joseph all the way back in the Book of Genesis.

Two weeks ago we looked at what "living faith" meant for
Abraham and Sarah in their generation.

-Now we come to their son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob,
and Jacob's son Joseph.

-Multiple generations of this family to whom God showed up
and said, "Follow me."

Listen to these three short verses with which the writer to the
Hebrews sums up these 3 generations of living faith.

-Hebrews 11:20-22.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau..."

"By faith Jacob blessed each of Joseph's sons..."

"By faith Joseph gave instructions about his bones!"

Wow, that's not a lot to go on in summing up these guys lives,
is it?

Especially if you know that the larger story of the lives of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph
-take up 26 chapters of the Book of Genesis.

The story of what “living faith” looked like in their lives is long and involved.

-There are ups and downs, and ins and outs,
-intrigue and deception, sibling rivalries, ...it’s a saga!

But the writer to the Hebrews says, “Isaac blessed Jacob, and Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons, and Joseph gave instructions about his bones.”

It seems a little crazy, but the fact that the writer to the Hebrews selects these isolated incidents

-from the lengthy story of those ancient patriarchs of the faith ought to make us pay attention to them.

What is it about these fathers blessing these particular sons that is so important?

-How is it that this blessing of their sons is something they do “by faith?”

-And why in the world does Joseph give instructions about his bones,

-and how is that an example of “living faith?”

Well, the key, my friends, is found in that definition of faith that the writer to the Hebrews set out for us
back in the first verse of this chapter:

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

And we have said that what faith is being sure of and hoping in are the promises of God.

-And what we do not yet see but are certain of is the fulfillment of God’s promises that are to come.

Living faith is about living in-between the promise and the fulfillment.

So that’s where these blessings of Isaac and Jacob on their sons come in.

In the ancient world, the blessing of the father was the assurance of the future inheritance.

-It was like the father writing out his Will, and stating that "this son" gets the primary share of everything I have.

When Isaac gives Jacob the blessing, he lays hands on him and says,

"May God give you of heaven's dew and of the earth's richness, an abundance of grain and new wine.

May nations serve you and people's bow down to you.

Be Lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.

May those who curse you be cursed, and may those who bless you be blessed."

You see, Isaac is pronouncing that Jacob is the true heir of his family.

-His brother Esau, and any other siblings yet to come, are going to bow down to him.

And not only will his brothers bow down to him, but nations and peoples will bow down to him as well.

-Because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not only passing on to successive generations their worldly wealth as an inheritance,

-but they are passing along the promises of God to be a chosen people,

-whom God will bless and through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

This promise of God is what Isaac "by faith" is passing on to Jacob as he blesses him.

And it is this promise of God that Jacob "by faith" is later passing on to Joseph and his sons.

They haven't yet received the fulfillment of that promise of God

-but in faith they are passing the promise on with an assurance of things hoped for and a certainty about things not yet seen.

So that's what the writer to the Hebrews is highlighting here.

They were looking forward in hope to the fulfillment,
and so they passed the promises and the blessing of God
onto the next generation in faith.

- They trusted the fulfillment was coming.
- And their hope and trust were in God.
- They were confident that He would deliver on His promise.
- That was their "living faith."

And you might think that these two fathers, who had such a
living faith in God's promises, were godly and holy men.

- Full of faith, hope, and love for God and for their families.

But the funny thing is, that when you go back and read the
actual saga of their lives,

- you find out that Isaac and Jacob in particular were far
from what you might think of as godly and holy.

I am not saying they were un-godly, but they were just guys.

- They were imperfect husbands, and imperfect fathers,
and imperfect brothers to their siblings,
-and imperfect followers of God.
- They were just like us!

When you read their stories, you discover that Isaac didn't just
bless Jacob.

- Jacob actually stole the blessing by deceit and manipulation.
- Isaac was blind at that point in his old age, and he actually
thought he was blessing his son Esau.
- But it was Jacob who had dressed himself up as His
brother and stole the blessing.

And Jacob's on-going story, and then Joseph's story,

- are the most topsy-turvy stories in the whole Bible.
- It's Reality TV right up there with the Kardashians.
- Go back and read Genesis 26-50 sometime soon.

"Holiness" and "Godliness" are not the words that will come to
mind when you read about this family's life together.

- But what the story does show us, is the infinite wisdom,
and overruling sovereignty and astonishing mercy of
God.

And over the course of their crazy lives, these men and women come to trust in that God.

- They come to trust in his infinite wisdom, and in his overruling sovereignty and in his astonishing mercy.
- That is what "living faith" is about.

And when Joseph, at the end of his life, gives instructions about his bones,

- it is a sign of just how much he has come to trust in the sovereignty and mercy of God.

Why? Because Joseph, as a young teenager,

- had gotten beat up by his 10 older brothers, and thrown in a well.
- But then his brothers sold him to a passing caravan of traders who were heading down from Canaan into Egypt.
- The traders, when they got down to Egypt, then sold Joseph as a slave to an Egyptian.

And over the course of his crazy life in Egypt, Joseph ultimately ended up becoming the Prime Minister of Egypt serving as Pharaoh's right hand man during a time of famine over the whole region.

Joseph's dysfunctional family ends up coming down to Egypt to get disaster relief aid during the famine,
-because there is no relief for them back in Canaan.

And through an amazing set of sovereignly guided circumstances, Joseph gets reunited with his brothers and with his father after many, many years.

They all end up staying in Egypt with Joseph who takes care of them.

- And then the descendants of Jacob and his sons will end up staying on in Egypt for 400 years,
-where ultimately they become slaves of the Egyptians long after Joseph dies.

But Joseph, when he is dying, he makes his family promise him, that when they go back to the land of Promise,
-they will take his buried bones back with them.

He does not want to be left in the land of Egypt.

-Why? Because he is trusting in the promises of God.

-He wants to be part of the fulfillment of the promise that God gave to Abraham.

-That is what he values. That is where his heart is set.

-Even though he was currently enjoying all of the benefits and blessings of living as the Prime Minister of Egypt,

-which was the greatest nation on earth at the time,

-in his heart Joseph knew he was not an Egyptian.

-He was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

-And the promises of God that had been made to his forefathers and passed on to him were more important to him than all the abundance of Egypt.

-He knew that God had promised to give them the land of Canaan as their inheritance.

-And they would be blessed there, and become a blessing to all the nations of the world.

That is what Joseph was looking forward to.

That is what he had an assurance of, though he did not yet see it fulfilled in his lifetime.

-But he gave instructions about his bones.

“Don’t let my bones stay forever in Egypt. When our people finally get out of here and go back to the land of Promise, -make sure you take me with you!”

Those instructions are a sign of what was in Joseph’s heart and mind.

-He had all that the world had to offer, but what he truly valued was what God had to offer,

-even though he didn’t yet have it.

That is living faith, says the writer to the Hebrews.

Looking forward in hope to what God has promised,

-and living your life in the present in light of that coming fulfillment.

So what does that mean for us?

Well, you and I have been given promises from God, too.

-And we are meant to bank our lives on them just like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob banked their lives on the promises God gave to them.

And the promises God has given us are not that we will inherit the land of Canaan, or have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

-To me that is good news, because I don't really want to live in the land of Canaan right now.

But the promises God gives to us are still born out of the same kind of infinite wisdom, and overruling sovereignty, and astonishing mercy

-that Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph experienced in their lives.

Promises like Isaiah 49:1

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, and you are mine."

Promises like Joshua 1:5

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Or like in Romans 8:1

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Promises like Romans 8:28

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose."

Do you actually believe that? Trust in it? Bank your life both now and forever on it?

Living faith happens when God shows up in our lives and actually enables us to know that he not only exists,

-but that He is a rewarder, in just these sorts of ways, for those who earnestly seek him.

We may not experience the fulfillment of all God's promises in our lifetimes,

-but just like the patriarchs, we can put our daily trust in
what God has said and promised,
-and we can rejoice knowing that the God whom we have
met and who made these promises,
-is infinitely wise, and sovereignly powerful, and
amazingly merciful,
-and will bring them to fulfillment.

Trusting in that is what the ancients were commended for.
How about us?