

“The Faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph”
(Hebrews 11:20-22)

Introduction: To be a Christian, you must have faith. You must have faith because the God of Christianity is a God whom you cannot see directly. Oh, yes, we can see the effects of God all around us. We can see what He has made. We can see His divine power and infinite wisdom in the things He has fashioned. But we cannot see God face to face. If someone asked you to show them God, you could not go to a particular place, ring a doorbell and introduce them to God. God is invisible. He dwells in a place which we cannot see called heaven. Therefore we must have faith if we are to see Him and live for Him. To be Christians we must also have faith because this God we cannot see has made many promises to us which we cannot see as well. He has promised to take care of us in life. He has promised us that He will work everything together for good, if we truly love Him. He has promised that on the day of His judgment, He will acquit us of all guilt, so that we will not be cast into hell for our sins. And He has promised to give to us an eternal kingdom, in which we will dwell forever and ever. Again, if someone said to you, Show me the things which God has promised to give to you, you would have to say, I can't, because these things are also invisible. They are yet in the future. They will happen in places which can't be seen with the eye. The New Heavens and the New Earth have not yet come. Yes, we might be able to point to the wonderful ways in which God takes care of us now, and how He has caused things to work together for good in our lives. But even these things people are very apt to dismiss as being the results of luck or good fortune. They are not willing to believe in the things they cannot see. But again, this is how the Christian is different. Though he cannot see these things because either they are invisible or they have not happened yet, yet *he can see them through the eyes of faith*. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith does not give reality to the things we can't see, it only allows us to see what is already real, just as light does not make the things in the room come into existence, it only allows you to see what was already there. The importance of faith for the Christian cannot be overstated. Without it, there is no reality to the things of the Lord. Without it you would be like any other person outside the church who walks around in the dark, not knowing even where he is going. Without it you would have no hope. But because of it, you can have the greatest confidence that what the Lord has promised, He will also fulfill.

The author to the Hebrews has been giving to us many wonderful illustrations of how this kind of faith changed the lives of those who possessed it. Tonight we will look at three more examples in the lives of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. And what I want for you to notice about these three examples is how

Faith made them look to the future with such certainty, that it changed the way that they acted in the present.

The author to the Hebrews, in using these men as examples of faith, could have pointed to many different situations in their lives in which they showed that they trusted

God. But he selects three situations in which these three men were looking to the same thing: the promise of God concerning their children and concerning the land. I would like for us to look briefly at each of these examples to see what we may learn about how true faith should impact our lives.

I. First, let us look at the example of Isaac. The author writes, “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.”

A. Isaac, you will recall, was the child of the promise.

1. He was the one, we saw last week, that Abraham received after years of waiting.
 - a. God had promised Abraham that He would give him a son. And even though he was old, and past the years of having children, yet he did not doubt that God could do and would do what He had promised.
 - b. Paul writes, “In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.” (Rom. 4:18-21).
2. Abraham believed, in hope against hope, that he might become the father of many nations. That is, he believed the promise of God, even though outwardly everything looked hopeless. And having patiently waited, he obtained the promises. Now it was Isaac’s turn to believe.
 - a. Being the child of promise meant not only that he was the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, it also meant that the greater fulfillment of the land promise, the promise of an innumerable seed and the blessing to all nations was also going to come through him.
 - b. It was Isaac’s turn now to exercise faith in the Lord. And this is exactly what he did.

B. The author refers to the last main event in Isaac’s life when he was old and near the end of his life. It was the time when he conferred a blessing upon his sons before he died.

1. If you will recall, this was time that Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac into giving the blessing of the first-born to Jacob, instead of to Esau, who was the first-born.
 - a. But even though Esau technically was the first-born, that didn’t mean that he would inherit the blessing of the first-born. That blessing belonged to the one that the Lord had determined to give it to.
 - b. And the Lord made it clear who that would be. Very early on, after Rebekah conceived, the children were already struggling in her womb. Wondering what this meant, she went to inquire of the Lord, “And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall

serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). God said that He would make Abraham the father of many nations. He had already raised up two at the time of his death, that of the Ishmaelites and those who would come through his son Isaac. But here there were two more nations being separated from his son Isaac, that of Israel and that of Edom. But notice here that the Lord clearly favored the younger, who, as we know, is Jacob.

- c. Another indication that Jacob would be the one to receive the right of the first-born was when Esau, returning home from hunting one day, was so hungry that he agreed to sell Jacob his birthright for a bowl of stew (25:27-34). The birthright was all of the special privileges and blessings which the first-born would receive from his father. Apparently Esau did not take his oath to Jacob seriously, for he still expected to receive the blessing and preeminence from his father. But God did take it seriously.
 - d. And then when the time came to confer the blessing, Rebekah talked Jacob into wearing Esau’s clothing and into putting animal skins on his arms and neck in order to deceive his father into giving the blessing to him, after Esau had gone out to hunt food for his father.
2. The blessing Isaac gave Jacob was as follows: He said, “Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine; may peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; be master of your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you” (27:28-29).
- a. This is the blessing which was intended for the first-born. The birthright would include a greater inheritance and authority over his brothers. This is exactly what Jacob received.
 - b. We can even see elements of the Abrahamic blessing incorporated into the blessing, where he says, “May peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you,” and, “Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you.” God had promised to make of Abraham a “great nation” (Gen. 12:2), which implies that other nations would bow down to him. And He also gave the same promise to Abraham, which we see Isaac giving here to Jacob, “And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse” (v. 3).
 - c. Later, Isaac even more clearly transfers the Abrahamic blessing to Jacob, where he says to Jacob, as he is sending him to Paddan-aram to find a wife, “May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you; that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham” (28:3-4).
 - d. Isaac also blessed Esau. But when you read the blessing he gave him, you can understand why Esau was so angry, he wanted to kill his brother for stealing his blessing (27:39-40). Here we see that the Lord uses the sins of men to accomplish what is plainly His holy will. For the Lord, before the twins were born, and had done anything good or bad, had already chosen Jacob (Rom. 9:10-13).

3. But the important thing to see here is that Isaac believed the promises of God enough to act upon them.
 - a. At that time Isaac had only two sons, and he had not inherited any of the land.
 - b. Yet he believed the promises of God, which He had made to Abraham. And because he did, he blessed both Jacob and Esau with regard to the things which were yet in the future, the things which could not yet be seen, at least with the human eye. They were so certain to him that they were real. Faith gives substance to the things which cannot be seen. It made them so real that it changed the way Isaac thought and lived.

II. The same thing is true with respect to the second example of Jacob.

- A. The author writes, “By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff” (v. 21).
 1. It appears that here there is a separation of the physical promise from the spiritual promise, for though Jacob did bless the two sons of Joseph, it was not through Ephraim or Manasseh that the blessing of the Messiah came.