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Sermon Notes

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Living Well and Dying Well by Faith: Jacob and Joseph

Hebrews 11:21-22

Why did the Author choose these strange moments from the lives of these three great patriarchs?

All three references to these great men of faith focus on the END of their lives, when they were DYING. Look at all the author could have chosen from their lives...

The author does not choose Jacob's dream, or his pledge to follow God... or the faith he showed in his time with Laban or the growth of his family... or his wrestling with the angel and overcoming... or any of his faith-filled statements... instead, he goes to the end of his life, the blessing of Joseph's sons...

The author does not mention Joseph's incredible dreams, which could have been evidence of his faith; nor his faith-filled resistance to Potiphar's wife's advances; nor his faith-filled demeanor when unjustly thrown in prison; nor his faith-filled interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker; nor his faith-filled patience in waiting upon God two more years in prison; nor his faith in rightly interpreting Pharaoh's dreams of the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine; nor his faith in recommending to Pharaoh a wise course of action; nor his faith in rising to be second in command of all of Egypt; nor his faith in dealing with the same brothers who had sold him as a slave into Egypt; nor his faith in forgiving them so sweetly and saying one of the most faith-filled utterances in the whole Bible:

Genesis 50:20 "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

All of these things were amazing examples of the faith of this man, Joseph... but the Author to the Hebrews chose this event at the very end of Joseph's life:

Hebrews 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.

In this way, we have a matched set... three examples of dying faith... faith exhibited right at the end of life

- By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau
- By faith Jacob blessed Joseph's sons at the end of his life

- By faith Joseph spoke about the Exodus and gave instructions about his bones at the end of his life

WHY?? Because the Author is trying to persuade the Hebrew Christians that this world is not their home, that they can die in faith, not receiving the things promised... thus they can LIVE in faith by the exact same principles!!

Bottom line, if you can DIE WELL, you certainly can LIVE WELL

I. The Faith of Isaac at Death: Overcoming Fleshly Dimness

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

II. The Faith of Jacob at Death: A Triumphant End to a Troubled Pilgrimage

Hebrews 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.

A. Jacob's Testimony About His Pilgrimage

Genesis 47:9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."

B. Jacob's Faith: A Smoldering Wick That Always Triumphed

1. A.W. Pink on Jacob's faith: like rays of sunlight through a foggy day

A.W. Pink: "A life of faith is not like the shining of the sun on a calm and clear day, its rays meeting with no resistance from the atmosphere. Rather it is more like the sun rising on a foggy morning, its rays struggling to pierce through and dispel the opposing mists."

2. Consistent pattern: flesh hindering, faith triumphing

- Despite the fact that Jacob used immoral means to obtain it, he valued the birthright as firstborn... Esau despised it
- Despite the fact that Jacob yielded to the foolish and sinful advice of his mother to lie to his father, he still valued the patriarchal blessing and the covenantal promises of God
- Despite the fact that Jacob showed a fleshly nature in bargaining with God after the dream of the stairway ascending and descending, still he yearned for God to be his God and to bless him all his life
- Despite the fact that Jacob stole illicitly away from Laban to return to the Promised Land, he still glorified God in the vow he took with Laban

- e. Despite the fact that Jacob was terrified at the prospect of meeting his brother Esau, he wrestled mightily with the angel of the Lord and overcame him to receive his blessings
- f. Despite the fact that Jacob was constantly seeking to better his earthly situation, he still lived as Abraham and Isaac had, in a tent as a stranger in the promised land

C. Jacob's Faith Triumphed Most at the End

- 1. After entering Egypt and being reunited with his son Joseph, Jacob's faith shone most brightly
- 2. He blessed Pharaoh with a powerful and patriarchal blessing... the most powerful man on the face of the earth seemed to shrink into insignificance before the greatness of Jacob, the man of faith
- 3. And especially in the two events described in Hebrews 11:21, he shows himself to be a finished product... a true hero of the faith

D. The Account of the Blessing of Joseph's Sons

- 1. The rights of the firstborn
 - a. Ordinarily the firstborn son receives a double portion of inheritance from the father
 - b. Jacob in effect bestowed this on Joseph... since we could see that the devil swindled Joseph from it by Laban's treachery in switching Leah for Rachel on their wedding night... Joseph was Rachel's firstborn, so in Jacob's mind, he was truly the firstborn...
 - c. AND one of Joseph's two sons would also have this privilege
- 2. Jacob adopts Ephraim and Manasseh

Genesis 48:5 Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.

- 3. The significance of the Patriarchal Blessing
 - a. Joseph knew the immense value of this blessing
 - b. He was the second most powerful man on the earth
 - c. He was wealthy beyond all imagination
 - d. His sons would live all their days in prosperity because of it

e. But Joseph yearned for the blessings of heaven... of the covenant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

f. Hence he brought these two sons to Jacob to have them blessed

4. Jacob crossed his hands ON PURPOSE

a. The right hand placed on the head of Ephraim

b. The left hand placed on the head of Manasseh, even though Manasseh was the firstborn

c. He was making a plain and powerful prophetic statement about these boys and their future as heads of powerful tribes... the older will be great, but the younger will be greater!!

5. Jacob's faith keen and strong... filled with thankfulness to God

Genesis 48:15-16 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."

a. Thankfulness for God's provision

b. Thankfulness for God's protection

6. Joseph deeply desired SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS for his sons... they were well-provided for materially, but Joseph knew that was nothing

E. The Testing of Jacob's Faith: Joseph's Objections and Jacob's Triumph

1. Joseph very displeased at Jacob's action

2. Joseph vigorously objected

3. Jacob's test: this POWERFUL MAN (second highest in all Egypt); also his BELOVED SON

a. Amazing how in both Isaac's case and Jacob's case, both of them have to disappoint a beloved son in order to do the blessing that God wanted them to do!

b. Lesson: sometimes faith has to cross the wish and will of a loved one!

Matthew 10:37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"

Luke 14:26 *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-- yes, even his own life-- he cannot be my disciple."*

4. Jacob overcomes by faith

F. The Contents of the Blessing of Joseph's Sons: Only Perceived by Faith

Genesis 48:15-16 *"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."*

Genesis 48:17-20 *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." ²⁰ He blessed them that day and said, "In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.*

1. What are the odds humanly speaking that the descendents of these "two young Egyptian princes" the sons of Joseph, would forsake Egypt and migrate to Canaan, the Promised Land??
2. What are the odds that they would each become a separate tribe?
3. What are the odds that the younger would far outstrip the older in blessings?
4. Jacob also spoke plainly about the Promised Land

Genesis 48:21-22 *Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers. ²² And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow."*

G. The Final Acts of Jacob's Faith: Demand About Burial and Worship

Genesis 49:29-32 *"I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰ the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. ³¹ There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. ³² The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites."*

1. Jacob makes Joseph swear concerning his burial
2. Why? A.W. Pink's five reasons
 - a. To show his spiritual unity with Abraham and Isaac in the covenant
 - b. To express his faith in the covenant of God which concerned Canaan and not Egypt
 - c. To draw off the minds of his descendents from thinking they would continue forever in Egypt
 - d. To signify that he would go before his descendents and, in symbolic form, take possession of the land before them
 - e. To show that Canaan was a type of heaven, the "Better Country" of Hebrews 11:16, the eternal resting place of the people of God
3. Jacob summons his strength one last time
4. Body posture is important in worship and prayer!!
5. The FINAL MENTION OF JACOB in scripture: Hebrews 11:21, he is worshipping!! 363 times Jacob is mentioned by name; the very last thing said about him in Scripture is this:

JACOB WORSHIPPED!!!

H. Summary

From the example of Jacob in Hebrews 11:21, we learn that faith can overcome a lifetime of struggles and shine most radiantly at the end of life.

III. The Faith of Joseph at Death: Seeing into the Distant Future

Hebrews 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.

- A. Great question: Why did the Author of Hebrews choose such a seemingly insignificant event from the life of such a hero of the faith?
 1. There was so much to choose from!!! Joseph's life was such a saga of God's severest tests and God's richest blessings
 2. PRIME EXAMPLE: Joseph's amazingly gracious attitude toward his brothers and his amazing statement of trust in God's sovereign control over all events for His own purposes:

Genesis 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

3. But the author takes us to the end of Joseph's life, to his death bed, to his giving of instructions concerning his bones
 4. Simple observation: if you prepare to die well, you will certainly live well
 - a. A Christian ought not to be passive in death... but energetically reaching forward to the promises of God
 - b. Joseph's death-bed faith is a powerful example of how we should all end well
- B. Joseph's Heart: With the Spiritual Riches and Power of the Gospel, not the Spiritual Riches and Power of Egypt
1. Joseph was not at all impressed with the dominant position of power he held in Egypt
 2. He was not consumed with how to pass on that wealth or power to his children
 3. His eye was not on the maintenance of a position of worldly ease and comfort and luxury for his posterity
 4. His heart was consumed with only one thing: the future of God's people in realizing the promises of God
 5. He brought his sons to be blessed by his dying father... not concerned with the riches of Egypt but with the riches of the promises of God
- C. The Time of Joseph's Statement
1. At the end of a life richly blessed by God
 2. After wielding almost unimaginable power as the de facto ruler of Egypt
 3. After living in the almost unspeakable luxury that his position would have given him
 4. His mind does not dwell on any of those privileges, but rather with the promises of God
 5. Note: wealth and power do not IN AND OF THEMSELVES injure a true believer... but they are dangerous commodities that have ruined many lesser figures than Joseph
 - a. dangers

Mark 4:18-19 *Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.*

1 Timothy 6:9-10 *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

b. Advice to rich believers

Psalm 62:10 *though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*

1 Timothy 6:17-19 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

6. What's on Joseph's mind: the FUTURE based on a promise made in the distant PAST

D. The Astonishing Promise to Abraham: Genesis 15:14-16

Genesis 15:13-16 *Then the LORD said to him, "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. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."*

1. The Circumstances of the Promise

a. Abraham was Joseph's great-grandfather...

b. But the story of this awesome promise had been passed on from generation to generation

c. This is the story of the SLAVERY in EGYPT AND the EXODUS to the Promised Land... made amazingly before Isaac was even conceived!

2. The Time Lapse: more than 200 years now

a. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all dead

b. Joseph is an old man... at the end of his life, 110 years old

c. The themes of the mysterious covenant with Abraham are already vigorously set in motion... Abraham's descendents are now definitely living in a land not their own... they have begun to multiply greatly in Egypt

3. The Transmission of the Promise: word of mouth from Isaac through Jacob to Joseph

4. The Fulfillment In Process... But Still Seemed Unlikely

E. Joseph's Faith Encompassed an Unlikely Future... and Believed it!!

1. Look at the "odds" against this fulfillment

2. The Jews were by now well-established in Egypt

3. The time of their enslavement was imminent... the time of the Exodus even further beyond

4. Joseph spoke very powerfully about the future to those who stood around his bed

Genesis 50:24-25 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."

5. Note Joseph's amazing confidence!!! "God SURELY come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land promised on oath..."

F. Joseph's Faith: First, the People... then the Burial Place

1. Joseph's priorities: FIRST, God's chosen people

2. Second: Joseph's own burial place

3. Beautiful to see Joseph so deeply concerned with the immediate welfare of his descendents and those of the other tribes!!!

G. A Symbol of Faith in the Promises of God

1. The command about his bones points to two things

2. First: faith in the promise of the land... the COVENANT MADE to ABRAHAM concerning the land

3. Second: faith in his own future resurrection!! What difference would the placement of his bones make if there is no resurrection???
4. The placement of the bones was no weird superstition, like some taboo Indian burial ground... rather, it was a symbol of his faith in these two promises: a promised land and a resurrection of the body

H. Faith Especially Triumphant over Death

1. As we have been noting, this is a powerful triumph of faith over DEATH
2. The author is consistently seeking to give his readers a triumphant faith over death
3. This commitment was fulfilled at the time of the Exodus

Exodus 13:19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place."

I. Summary:

From the example of Joseph's faith while dying as recorded in Hebrews 11:22, we can learn how far in the future the eye of faith can see, and how triumphant faith can be over the immediate circumstances of either wealth and power on the one hand or death on the other.

IV. Applications

- A. Come to Christ!! None of this Matters at all if you don't know Him!!
- B. Prepare to Die Well so you can live well step by step
- C. Jacob: Through many twists and turns, end up worshiping!! May the final words written about you be that you worshiped the God who had led you faithfully through your pilgrimage
- D. Joseph: develop a multigenerational vision for your family and its posterity that is based solely on the promises of God!! Prepare them for the future as the Scripture lays it out
 1. Ask: what is still to come in the promises of God?
 2. Answer:
 - a. the advance of the gospel to the ends of the earth
 - b. the coming of the Antichrist and the terrible tribulations spoken of in Daniel, Matthew 24 and Revelation

- c. the Second Coming of Christ and Judgment Day
 - d. Rewards...
 - e. Heaven and Hell
3. Prepare your great-grandchildren for what is really coming!!!