

Lesson 36
The Confidence of Faith
Hebrews 11:20-22

My own personal study in the Book of Hebrews, especially the eleventh chapter, has been just super and has come at a very needy time in my own experience to walk by faith. However, in my study of these three verses, I had a difficult time at first getting any real spiritual truth. I came to the conclusion that there are two themes in these verses: 1) facing death by faith and 2) accepting God's promises by faith.

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian and philosopher, made a profound statement. He said, "There comes a midnight when all men must unmask." All men wear masks and all try to hide their true identity. For every one of us, in one way or another, life is a masquerade. We seek to hide our faults from others, to cover our inadequacies, so they will not be seen. We think that the masks we are wearing hide our real selves from those who would know us. Some men grapple with life more honestly and a few of their masks come down in this life, but no one has defeated totally the problem of hypocrisy.

However, there is a final midnight when we shall all be unmasked and that midnight is the time of death when all of a man's life will be laid bare before Almighty God. Most men fear death; they do not want to talk about it or think about it. Perhaps you are even now saying to yourself, "I'm interested in life not death. I want to talk about life - don't bring up death!" Fear of death is natural because death is man's greatest foe. But as with all other foes, death must be faced.

Someone has said, "Life is not comprehended truly or lived fully unless the idea of death is grappled with honestly." Billy Graham has said, "We are not prepared to live until we are prepared to die." We must gain the victory over the fear of death, or life will not reach its richest and deepest meaning for us.

Because people run from death, they never stop long enough to consider the reasons for their intense fear of it. One very obvious reason men fear death is that they do not know what lies beyond this life and what the final time of unmasking will be like. If we only knew what to expect, it would not be so bad. In other difficulties, we can usually find someone whom we can trust to guide us through hard times. In other circumstances, there is someone who has had the same experience, who can tell us what to expect, and how best to face it. Yet death is not that way. There is no mere human who can help a person in death, for there is no one who has experienced death who ever came back to tell us about it.

There is someone who died and rose from the dead who knows all about death-- that is Jesus Christ, the God-Man. Only God, as He is revealed in Christ, can help a person at the moment of death, for only a deep faith in the living God can ever take away the fear of death.

In Hebrews 11:20-22, we have three men, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, all of whom were facing death. Yet, as we are going to find, none expressed fear of dying. Each one, instead, was

marked by confidence and hope. They were desirous right up to the end of their lives to see God's promises fulfilled. They had learned in their lifetime to trust God and, therefore, were ready to trust God in death. They were men of faith and the man of faith does not have to fear because the man of faith dies as he lives - by faith.

Unless you and I trust God in life, we will have no one whom we can trust in death.

ISAAC FACES DEATH AND BELIEVES GOD - Hebrews 11:20

“By faith Isaac blessed, Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.” -- Isaac knew that death was imminent for him because he was an old man. By faith, Isaac pronounced prophetic benedictions on his two sons, Jacob and Esau, which were accurately accomplished in history just as he predicted. The “things to come” refers to the respective futures of these two boys. The background for this incident can be found in Genesis 27.

Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was Isaac's favorite son because he was the first one to come out from his mother's womb. Esau, by human standards, was to be given the birthright. The birthright meant more than receiving a double portion of the father's inheritance but that through this particular line of descendant would come the Messiah. Jacob, however, was the favorite son of Rebekah, Isaac's wife. Rebekah had been informed by God that God was going to reverse the birthright and the respective destinies of these twins.

“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).

I am convinced in my own mind that Rebekah somehow made this revelation clear to Isaac, but Isaac took it with a grain of salt and was determined to give the blessing to Esau.

Rebekah, however, believed what God had said concerning Jacob and she helped the younger twin, Jacob, to deceive his father and receive the better blessing. Isaac was blind and was about to bestow the blessing on Esau, when she fixed Jacob up and put sheep skin around his neck and on his hands. Consequently, Isaac thought Jacob was Esau. Isaac, being deceived, gave the blessing to Jacob.

“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 people 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” (Gen. 27:28-29).

Whatever human means were used (and they were deplorable) for Jacob to get the blessing, Jacob was God's choice and God's will was done.

Isaac was the custodian of the promises which God had given to Abraham, his father. In Jacob's blessing we read, ***“Cursed be those who curse you, And blessed be those who bless you.”*** This is a definite part of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3). In this blessing, Isaac passed the

responsibility of the covenant on to Jacob. With this act, he also expressed a great confidence in God that God would fulfill His promise to Abraham -- a land, a great nation and the promised seed through whom Messiah would come and the world would be blessed.

Isaac also later blessed Esau and predicted the future accurately concerning his posterity.

“Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven from above. And by your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck” (Gen. 27:39-40).

In what spectacular way did Isaac exercise faith in God? After Jacob had deceived his father and received the blessing, Esau discovered the matter and reported it to his father. Isaac, being aware of God’s sovereign plan, refused to take away the blessing from Jacob and give it to Esau. He would not revoke his blessing.

“And Isaac his father said to him, ‘Who are you?’ And he said, ‘I am your son, your first-born Esau.’ Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, ‘Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed’” (Gen. 27:32-33).

Even though Esau was his favorite, Isaac would not reverse his decision and he bowed to the divine decree.

“And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, “THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER”” (Rom. 9:10-13).

This incident of the blessing of Jacob and Esau shows us clearly that God’s plans come about in spite of the wrong actions of men. God rules and overrules and His hidden plans are never frustrated by men.

“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, But the counsel of the LORD, it will stand” (Prov. 19:21).

“The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples” (Psa. 33:10).

“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established. And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isa. 46:9-10).

Death was imminent for Isaac but he thought only of passing the blessing of Abraham on to his son. There seemed to be no fear of death but anticipation and certainty of faith in God. Isaac learned in life that God could be trusted and he also knew God could be trusted in death.

JACOB FACES DEATH AND BELIEVES GOD - Hebrews 11:21

“By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped leaning on the top of his staff.” -- When faced with death, Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, indicating his belief in the promise made to Abraham. Manasseh, the oldest son, was to receive the blessing, but Jacob crossed his hand and the blessing fell on Ephraim, through whom the Messiah would come.

“The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them. And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:16).

Jacob was also the custodian of the promise.

“Then Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, ‘Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession’” (Gen. 48:3-4).

Jacob in the early part of his life had not walked close to his God, but after God appeared to him and confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to him, his life began to change. He walked by faith, and at his death he was confident that God would keep His promises to His children and give them the Promised Land.

“Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers’” (Gen. 48:21).

When facing death, Jacob showed no fear, no uncertainty, but was a man who worshipped God, knowing that God was faithful to His earthly promises and heavenly promises. He was not afraid of death. He lived by faith and now he must die by faith as well.

JOSEPH FACES DEATH AND BELIEVES GOD - Hebrews 11:22

“By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.” -- Joseph, by faith, believed God for things to come. Even though he was living in the luxury of Egypt as the prime minister of that country, he was a man of the future, for he knew that God would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt.

“And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob’” (Gen. 50:24).

He believed in God's promise and knew that it would come about, even though he did not exactly know how it would happen. Joseph predicted the exodus, even though the children of Israel were comfortably settled in Egypt, enjoying high privilege and great influence in the royal court. The exodus did not actually take place until 400 years later.

Joseph was so confident that Israel would leave Egypt that he made the Israelites promise to take his bones with them when they left. ***“Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, ‘God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here’”*** (Gen. 50:25).

Joseph had trusted God all through his life and he was ready to trust the Lord in death. God would be faithful in death as He was faithful in life. Joseph had a calm assurance and confidence that God was faithful. There was no fear, only commitment to God and confidence that God would keep His promise.

May I suggest to you another reason Joseph wanted his bones removed from Egypt was that on resurrection day he would be raised in the Promised Land. Joseph could have been buried in an Egyptian tomb but chose a mere coffin, a temporary burying place, because he had a higher hope than an earthly tomb. He believed in resurrection.

APPLICATION TO BELIEVERS

Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were all wealthy men, but on their death beds they were not talking about their earthly riches but were more concerned with spiritual riches. They thought about the future and God's blessing. The promises of God gripped their souls and prepared them for death.

Isaac, Jacob and Joseph at death were concerned about their children and that they would have the blessing of God. What are you passing on to your children? The thing of most value to pass on to our children is not our wealth but our spiritual heritage in Christ. We must teach our children to love and obey the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as He is manifested in Christ.

The patriarchs were concerned about God's blessing on their children. The last thoughts their children had of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were about their concern to keep God's promise.

What will your children remember you for when you die? Will it be your wealth, your wit, your great name, your great person? I trust not, but that your children will remember you as men and women of faith who were not afraid of death and believed in the one, true and living God.

CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, the lesson God wants you to learn is that death is a horrible fate for a person outside of Christ. Death for a non-Christian means a face-to-face confrontation with the God of wrath and eternal judgment. If you are outside of Christ, you should fear death. Fear should grip your soul every time the concept of death crosses your mind.

However, I have good news for you. God has made it possible for you to get deliverance from this fear of death. The solution to death is trusting in Jesus Christ, who rose victorious over sin

and death.

“Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb. 2:14-15).

Those who learn to trust Christ in this life have nothing to fear in the hour of death, for God is faithful to His promise about life and about death.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (John 11:25-26).