

The Hall of Faith: Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph

Hebrews 11:20-22

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, March 19, 2023

[Beginning of sermon had audio technical difficulties.]

...The author mentioned 16 people in here. So far we've looked at five of them. We've looked at Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah. And this morning, we're coming to the next three in the list that are all lumped in here together. And that's Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. They're known as the patriarchs or the fathers of Israel. So these are the men that fathered the nation after Abraham died. They're the next guys in the list that brought about the race of Jews.

And to be honest, this morning, I'd like to introduce them with a story like we've done in previous weeks because stories always kind of are a good way to bridge the gap between their lives and ours. But there's not one story that describes all of them together, so I can't do that; but there's a promise that does that. And so I want to show you this promise, if you would turn in your Bibles to look at Genesis. You've already looked in Hebrews, you can keep your marker there; we're going to go there in a moment but turn to Genesis 17. This sets the stage for what we're going to talk about because it does tell you about these men indirectly. If you look in Genesis 17:1, it says,

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abraham and said to him,

“I am God Almighty;
Walk before Me, and be blameless.
I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
And I will multiply you exceedingly.”

Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying,

“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,
And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.
No longer shall your name be called Abram,
But your name shall be Abraham;
For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

We'll stop the reading there. I don't know what goes through your mind when you read this, but when I studied this, I'm always amazed by what it says. This is what's known as the Abrahamic Covenant. It's the time when God takes one man out of all creation, and He makes a promise to him. He takes one soul out of all the earth, and He makes a covenant to do something special through his family.

Now, we've said a lot about this in previous weeks. So I don't want to repeat anything we've said so far, other than just to show you what it says about Abraham's descendants in it. Men like Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, because it says in verse six if you look in your Bibles that "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations out of you." In other words, the Lord tells Abraham that not only will I make one descendant out of you, but I'll make several. And not only will I provide one child of the promise for you, but I will give you multiple children or offspring, enough to form a nation. At this time, the way things were often done is when empires like Babylon and Rome started taking over the world, they did it through one family that became big enough to form its own power system. And the Lord says, "That's what I'll do with you." And then verse seven says, "I will establish My covenant between you and them." In other words, this promise won't stop with Abraham, but it will be made through his family too. It won't cease after he dies; it'll carry over to his kids because the family will keep getting bigger and bigger and bigger over time. One day, they're going to reach the four corners of the globe. Even today, you go to Canada, there's Jews there. You go to the US, there's Jews there. You go to Africa or Asia, there's Jews there. The same verse says, "I will do this as an everlasting thing," which means I will make the promise eternally. I will keep it with you forever, so if you're ever worried that a day will come when your bloodline will dry up and die, it won't. But the point here is that this is how the Abrahamic Covenant work. It was to be kept up through his offspring. This is how it functioned; it perpetuated through his children because it was an intergenerational thing. The Lord set it up in such a way that it would pass on from one child to the next and carry over from one son to the other all throughout history. So that after Abraham died, his son would have it and his son and his son and his son.

Which makes you wonder, "why," doesn't it?. I mean, we've talked about this before, but it makes you wonder, what made the people of Israel so special to deserve this? And the answer is nothing. Why did God do anything for anybody? It was all of His grace.

But having said that, there was still one thing that Jews had to do if this covenant was going to help them spiritually, and that was to believe it. There was one way they had to respond if they wanted to be saved from their sins and go to heaven, and that is to trust it in themselves. Otherwise, they would be lost because they couldn't go to heaven just by osmosis. And they couldn't be saved just because they were children of Abraham; it had to be a personal thing. I mean, make no mistake, the covenant was going to save their race; it was designed to do that. But if they wanted it to do more, it had to go past the physical side of things and penetrate their own heart individually.

Which is what this passage says because if you look back at it in verse one, the Lord tells Abraham, “I am God Almighty, so walk before Me.” In other words, “This is what you're to do with this covenant, Abraham, you need to walk with Me. You need to stay close to My name and draw near even if you're one of My chosen people, that commandment still applies to you.”

And the same verse tells Abraham to be blameless as well, which means you need to live a life free from sin. “Don't think I'm going to overlook your wicked behavior, Abraham just because you're special, and don't believe I will let you get away with sin just because you're mine, I'm not.”

And then verse nine says, “You have to keep My covenant.” Which means that “When I speak, Abraham, you need to listen. And when I talk, you obey.” Because the point is, you have a responsibility in this as a Jew. Even though I made this covenant with you out of grace, that doesn't mean you can take advantage of it now and do whatever you please, you can't. You have to take it more seriously than that,

You can imagine why this would be important to think about because there's a tendency for the Jews to read this passage later on, and say to themselves, “I can do anything I want to do now because I'm Jewish. And I can live however, I please and go to heaven, because I'm Abraham's child.” But the truth is that you can't, which brings us back to the book of Hebrews. If you want to turn there in your Bibles, this is what the author is talking about next in the Hall of Faith. Because here, he tells you how Abraham's immediate descendants responded to the covenant. And what he says is encouraging because they did what their father Abraham did. If you look at Hebrews 11:20, here's the men that follow right after Abraham. It says,

By faith Isaac, blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

Now, what does that mean? Why does the author mention these men? Well he does it to say that not only did Abraham have faith, but so did Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. And not only did the father of Israel, trust in God, but so did the son and the grandson and the great grandson. We're going to talk about all these examples of faith here in a moment because I'll walk you through each one of them together. But the idea is that this is how these men responded to the covenant: they knew it is not enough to hear the Word of God, you have to believe it for yourself.

You know, it's been said that in the spiritual realm, God has children, but He has no grandchildren. And it's great if your parents are saved, and it's wonderful if they knew the Lord, but you must be saved. And you must know Him too if it's going to do you any good. Otherwise, you'll be lost. You can't just sit back and relax because you come from a godly family, amen? And you can't just prop your feet up and take it easy just because your relatives had faith in God. You have to have faith too. It's always been that

way. I mean, if anybody could have been saved through their relatives, it was Israel. And this passage makes it clear that it didn't happen. I like that. I mentioned that because I think some people forget this in the church. A lot of us come from godly families, don't we? There's a number of us who grew up hearing the promises of God since we were a child to the point that if someone asks you, "Are you saved?" Some of you might say, "Of course I'm saved. I'm Baptist. My father was Baptist. Grandfather was Baptist, great grandfather was Baptist, it's in my blood." If they were to say, "Are you a Christian?" Some would say, "Of course I'm a Christian, I'm reformed." My mother was reformed, grandmother was reformed, my people have been reformed since the beginning; so that I know God will accept me because He owes it to my family." The fact is that He doesn't. God holds each person accountable for their own lives, regardless of your family; that's what we're going to talk about this morning in the lives of these people.

So this morning, we're going to look at three examples of the patriarch's faith in this passage. So if you're taking notes, this is our outline for today. And again, I'm going to explain each one of these examples of faith as we go through them, but there's three examples of the patriarch's faith in this passage.

And the first one is Isaac. You can just see these men in the chapter here, and we're gonna go back to Genesis as well to talk about him. But the first example of their faith is Isaac, who is the son of Abraham. The reason he's first in the list is because he's the first child in the family. He's the one of the promise that Abraham was waiting on.

As you look in verse 20, there's this phrase that you've got to be familiar with after we've talked about this chapter for so long. And that is the phrase "by faith." Verse 20, starts off with those words "by faith." It's the most important one in here. It's repeated more than 20 times to introduce each of the major characters. Which is why verse four says, "By faith Abel," and then it tells you about him. And then verse five it says, "By faith Enoch," and it tells you about him. And then verse seven says, "By faith Noah," and it tells you about him to remind you how each of these people approached God, and that was their trust and not their works. They were saved by grace like you and not by anything that they had done even though their stories are found way back in the Old Testament. And after saying that about the first five people in the chapter, verse 20, now comes to the next one. This is the next figure when it says "By faith Isaac."

I've told you before, the name Isaac means laughter. Because Genesis 17 says when Isaac was born, the Lord told Abraham, or before he was born, he would have a son and he laughed at it. Not in a joyful way, but in a scornful way because he didn't believe that. He thought that thing was a joke. And so the Lord said, "Do you want to laugh at me, Abraham? Okay, you can name the boy laughter when he comes as a reminder not to do that anymore."

When you look at a survey of this man's life, you find he has an interesting character in the Bible because he was the first full blooded Jew in history. Because the Bible tells us that Abraham and Sarah were Gentiles. They weren't Jewish. They came from the land of Ur, so they would have talked like Gentiles and walked like Gentiles and dressed like Gentiles but not Isaac. He was raised in a God-fearing home. He was the longest living patriarch, Genesis 35:28, says he was 180 years old when he died. So to put this in perspective, Abraham was 175, Jacob was 147, Joseph was 110, but Isaac lived to be 180. So he had a much longer lifespan, which makes his story so sad because the fact is, even though he lived that long, he was almost forgotten in the Bible because he didn't do much for God. He was a pretty passive individual. Some have called him The Reluctant Patriarch because he was reluctant to do anything, it seemed like. His life was pretty mundane. He was born in Genesis 21. In Genesis 24, a bride is found for him. In Genesis 26, he lies about his wife to save his skin. Then in Genesis 27, he blesses his children, and that's what this passage refers to in verse 20 of Hebrews 11. If you read this, it says, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come." Now it mentions this because apparently this is when Isaac's faith shines the most, and that was at the time he was giving his blessing.

Now the word for blessing in Hebrew is a word that means to bless someone or give them honour; but the way it's used, it could also refer to the practice of giving your children their inheritance on your deathbed. The ancient people did not have lawyers like we do today that could give your children their inheritance after you are gone by reading a last will and testament. They didn't do it like that. Instead, they would gather your family around you as you were passing, and you would give them their endowment out loud. And as you did that, the expectation was you always gave the greatest blessing to the firstborn. And since he was considered to be the strongest member of the family and the one with the most potential, the firstborn child was always given the primary control of the estate. Which is what this is referring to, except that Isaac didn't do this in the usual way. Because when it says here, that he blessed Jacob and Esau, if you notice, Jacob's name comes first even though he was the second born to show us that Isaac blessed him first. In fact, if you want to see this in your Bibles, keep your finger in Hebrews and turn back to Genesis 27. Because here it tells you how Isaac blessed Jacob over Esau.

And while you're turning there, I just want to warn you that if you've never read this story before, it's an unusual one, because it reads more like a soap opera. It's a tale full of jealousy, betrayal, and greed. It couldn't be any further from the example of what a godly family is supposed to be. Remember, this is Abraham's family. These are the people of the covenant. And you would expect a better manner of living than this.

And I can't read this off for the sake of time other than to point out that verse one tells you that "Now it came about, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see." In other words, this is happening as Isaac is dying, or he thinks he's dying because he couldn't see anymore. He's going blind. So he calls Esau, his firstborn son to his side, and asked him to prepare some savory dish so he could bless him in his final hours, which Esau does, because he goes to get some game, he prepares a bowl of soup. And

while he's gone, verse five says Isaac's wife, Rebecca, hears what he says. She's snooping around the tent. So she goes to Jacob, the second born son and says this in verse six.

Rebecca said to her son, Jacob, “Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, ‘Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.’ Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death.”

Jacob answered his mother Rebecca, “Behold, Esau saw my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing.” But his mother said to him, “Your curse beyond me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.” So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory foods such as his father loved. Then Rebecca took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made to her son Jacob.

And as the story goes on, it tells us how he went in and stole Esau’s blessing.

Now, as you read that, you've got to say it's a pretty sad story, right? I mean, Isaac is dying, and what is his family doing? They're lying to him. They're deceiving him. He's passing away, and how do they respond? Well, they're scheming behind his back. It's bad enough to lie to your father, it's even worse to do it on his deathbed. And that's what you see here, and Isaac goes on and falls for it. Verse 27 says he turns to Jacob, and he gives him the blessing that Esau deserved. He gives him Esau’s inheritance, after which Esau comes back and he goes to his father. And Isaac says to him in verse 32, “Who are you?” In other words, “What do you mean you’re Esau? I thought he was Esau. You say you’re Esau, he’s Esau. You're my oldest. He's my oldest. He's blind, remember? He can't tell what's going on. But as soon as Esau speaks to him, Isaac figures it out because he says in verse 35 that “your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing.” And from this point onwards, Esau tries to change his father's mind, but he can't. Isaac sticks with the decision.

Which makes you wonder, as you read all that, okay, well, let's back up for a minute. What does that have to do with Isaac's faith? You remember the book of Hebrews says, “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob,” right? What does that have to do with faith? I mean, this looks like a mistake to me. And it looks like it was some big misunderstanding. But the idea seems to be that by faith after all this happened, Isaac accepted this as God's will. Even though the whole thing looks like a gong show, Isaac knew there was something else going on behind the scenes, and that is that God was working and he believed it. If you

want to write this verse down, Genesis 25:23 says that the Lord told Rebecca, that the older shall serve the younger. In other words, Jacob will get the share of the blessing, the greater share; he'll get primary control of the estate. And when it happened here, Isaac said, "Okay, Lord, I trust you in that. Even though I wanted to bless Esau. And even though I wanted to give my inheritance to the firstborn," the way things were done at this time, he said, "I'll submit to Your will instead." And that's a kind of a long explanation of what Hebrews is talking about.

But the lesson here is that sometimes God moves in mysterious ways. I mean, sometimes He does things in a way you would not expect. And when He does, you have to trust Him instead of resisting Him all the time. Because if you think about it, if you were trying to fulfill a prophecy, you wouldn't do it like this, would you? And if you were trying to keep a promise, you wouldn't use these people. They're a mess. You talk about a dysfunctional family. In this story, you have a blind father, a scheming wife and a son who likes to play dress up, right? You have a feeble old man, a crafty spouse, and another boy who acts like a caveman, hairy, goes hunting, makes savoury soup and all that kind of stuff. Sometimes God does that. He uses the foolish things of the world to shame the strong. It's been said that God is not responsible for evil, but He does guide the world and He's sovereign over it like a man guides water in his hand. And He uses it for His purposes. And that's what you see here. This was an evil thing that Jacob did. This was wrong. There's no way you can deny that, but it didn't stop God from accomplishing His purposes. I mean, someone may be doing something evil to you today, and they may be treating you like Jacob treated his brother. But the fact is that God can still use it for your good; you just have to learn to trust Him in that.

The Jews actually tell a story in which someone came to Isaac after this years later. And they asked him, "Why didn't you switch the blessing back?" And he said, "Because I was blind, and I couldn't see; so I figured God knew what He was doing better than I did." And he's right friends. Sometimes you have to realize God knows what He's doing, even when we don't understand.

Which brings us to another example of these men's faith in this passage. And that is the example of Jacob. A second example of the patriarchs' faith in this passage is the example of Jacob who is Abraham's grandson. The reason he comes next in the list in Hebrews 11 is because he's the next in the line of succession. First there's Abraham, then there's Isaac, and then there's Jacob, who was mentioned in Hebrews 11 as well, if you want to turn back there. We are going to be flipping back and forth between Hebrews and Genesis this morning because this passage in Hebrews 11 has a lot of Old Testament background to it, so you can't really understand it unless you go back to the Old Testament. But for now, let's refer to the New Testament to get the original passage we were talking about.

And as you're turning there, the name Jacob means deceiver. To give you a little introduction to him, one who grasps the heel. The Bible tells us when Jacob and Esau were born, they were twins. And as they came out of the womb, Esau came out first, and Jacob followed holding onto his brother's heel. So they named him trickster as a result. Probably because they thought it was funny, but it wasn't. Actually

because the name Jacob was one he would earn because all throughout his life, he was always playing tricks on people, and lying. He lied to his father, lied to his brother, lied to his uncle Laban later on. When you look at his life, you find he's another important figure because his name is mentioned 300 times in the Bible. He was the first one to be called an Israelite. After going by the name Jacob for several years, Genesis 32 says Jacob got caught in a wrestling match with a mysterious person who touched his hip so that he dislocated it and changed his name to Israel, which means one who wrestles with God because all throughout his days, Jacob was constantly wrestling with the Lord.

He was also the man that the 12 tribes of Israel would come from. And Jacob would have 12 sons through which the rest of the nation would arrive. Their names are Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulan, Joseph and Benjamin. The significance to those sons is that if you were to ask a Jew, "Where do you come from?" They probably wouldn't say, "I come from the tribe of Jacob," they would probably say, "I come from the tribe of Reuben, or I come from the people of Judah." That's where their identity came from. And one more fact about this guy is that after having those 12 sons, Jacob relocated them to the land of Egypt, because he was the first patriarch to move into that foreign place.

And while he's there, Hebrews 11:21 refers to this when it says this, it says initially, when he first moved to Egypt, this is what Jacob did, "By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." Now, the way that's worded is important, because it says, "By faith Jacob, blessed each of the sons of Joseph," if you notice, it doesn't say that he blessed the sons of Jacob, he blessed the sons of Joseph. Not his children, but his grandchildren. The reason that's important is because when he was blessing them, Joseph put his two sons next to Jacob's deathbed, with Manasseh on his right hand, and Ephraim, the second born on his left hand. And Jacob swapped his hands; he did this in order to emphasize that he was trusting in the promises of God as well. He was putting his faith in Him. And to be honest, when you read this verse in Hebrews, it's a little mysterious because I couldn't find where that commandment was found, where the Lord commanded him to do that. Because it looks like one of the times when the author of Hebrews, through the inspiration of the Spirit, takes you into the mindset of this man to tell you that whatever was going on in Jacob's heart as he did this, his faith had something to do with it, because he was acting out of submission to God.

And when you think about Jacob's life, one thing that jumps out at you is that this is not the only time he showed his faith like this. He did it other times, too. And one of them is found in Genesis 28, if you want to turn back there. It gives you another example of this man's faith in God because it tells you what happens right after that story that I just read to you. Where Jacob deceives his father and he tricks him out of Esau's birthright. Because Genesis 28:10 it says, after Jacob did that horrific thing, it says,

He departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under

his head, and lay down in that place. And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised to you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

We'll stop the reading there. Now what's this story about? Well it seems like it's the story of Jacob's conversion, doesn't it? I mean, when you read it, it looks like the time he was saved. Because after lying to his dad and robbing Esau of the inheritance, this is what the Lord does for him. He repeats the Abrahamic covenant to him. These are the words he mentioned back in Genesis 27 to his grandfather, Abraham, and how does Jacob respond? Well, it blows him away. He believes for the first time. There's no evidence that Jacob ever believed before this or did anything for the Lord because this is where it all started for him. Because the Lord tells him that He will multiply his descendants, and give him the land, and go with him wherever Jacob goes. And it turns things around for him. Because verse 12 says, if you look back in verse 12, Jacob had a dream and behold, there was a ladder set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and the angels were ascending and descending on it, which looks like a vision of salvation, doesn't it? It appears to be a vision of how to reach God. Because when God saves the man, the man doesn't climb to heaven, God comes to the earth. And when He redeems him, the man doesn't do it all, it's the other way around. Salvation is a one-way street. It doesn't start when you clean yourself up, and you do something special. It starts when God takes the initiative, and to reach into your cold, dead heart and give you life. I mean, what's interesting about this passage is that you don't find here that before the Lord did all this for Jacob, Jacob had to go back to his father and apologize. And before the Lord gave the vision, he had to go to Esau and make it right. You just read that the Lord appeared to him and did it all. Because Jacob's life is a reminder that through the power of God, people can change. And through His mercy, they can become different. They don't have to stay in the same wicked place forever, the Lord can bring them out of it.

In fact, if you want to go back after the message today and go home and read Jacob's story, one thing that's interesting is if you look at certain periods of his life, you would say there's no hope for this man, right? And if you observe certain stages of his testimony or his behavior, you would say he didn't have a chance. Look at how bad he was. Lying to his father, scheming with his mother, stabbing his brother in the back, running away from this problem, that problem and that problem. Every time you turn around, Jacob is fleeing from somebody. But the story reminds you that just because someone starts off that way, it doesn't mean they have to end up that way, if they have faith. If they trust in God, God can do a

miracle and change them. In fact, in Genesis 28, I wish I could tell you this is where Jacob story ends because he never went back to his sin after this, but it doesn't. After this, it wouldn't be too long before he would marry one wife and then another, which was a sin. You weren't supposed to do that. But he would marry two sisters, Leah and Rachel and live with them in polygamy. And then Genesis 31 says after he did that, he would deceive his uncle Laban by running away from him after arguing with him over some issues. Because the running didn't stop. But the point is that Jacob believed in Him here, and that's what saved him.

I'll never forget the time I ran into someone at a church in California that I recognized, and I couldn't figure out where so I asked him about it. And he took me aside and he whispered in my ear, he said, "You know what? You came to preach at a service at a drug and alcohol rehab center where I used to be hooked on heroin. Until the Lord saved me, and He brought me here." And he was embarrassed by it; and I almost shouted out loud, "Hallelujah! Praise God you're here because the old is gone, the new has come." That's what faith produces in a person. That's what faith did in the life of Jacob.

Which brings it to another example of the patriarchs' faith, and this is the last one here. And that is Joseph. A third example of the patriarchs' faith in this chapter is that of Joseph. You have Isaac, Jacob, which are two very unlikely characters in the Hall of Faith. By the way, these are two men that you wouldn't think would make it into this passage because they were so wicked at times, or apathetic. But they're placed in here to remind you even so, they weren't saved by their behavior. They were saved by the Lord's grace, just like the rest of us. And it brings it to this next man, and that is Joseph, who is the great grandson of Abraham. He's the third generation to come after him.

And if you look in Hebrews 11 again there, it says in verse 22, the same phrase that we've seen over and over again, and that is that "by faith Joseph." This is the last time in this chapter where that phrase is repeated back-to-back like this in a short space of time. To say that again, the author's lumping these men in here together, they're all patriarchs or the fathers of Israel. And the name Joseph means God will increase because the Bible tells us as they went to Egypt, that Jews were 70 people in number. But at the time they left Egypt they were 2 million because the Lord increased their population. And Joseph played a major role in that. He was the first one to make the long journey from Canaan to Egypt, and he didn't do it in a normal way if you remember his story because he went there as a slave. The Bible tells us that after Jacob had his 12 sons, his brothers became jealous of one son, Joseph, because their father spoiled him and gave him a coat of many colors. So as a result, one day they said, "Here comes that dreamer Joseph; let's beat him up." And they did, and they stripped him of his coat, threw him into a pit, until some slave traders came by and bought him. Whereby they took him to Egypt. And he was eventually catapulted to the top of the Empire; he became the second greatest ruler in the land. And this is what Hebrews 11:22 is talking about because after that, it says that "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, [in Egypt, as the second greatest ruler in the land,] made mention of the exodus." And that means that as he was dying, Joseph told his family that there would be an exodus one day, and they would leave Egypt.

If you think about that, that's very interesting because Joseph spent his entire adult life in Egypt. The Bible tells us he was 17 years old when he left the promised land; he died when he was over 100. In all that time, he stayed in the land of Pharaoh, and at the end of his life, what he's telling them is, "I don't care about that. Take me back home. None of that matters to me; it's not a hill of beans in my eyes, I want you to bury my body in the Promised Land." I don't know about you, but that's some kind of faith, isn't it? How many of you know someone who would be the second highest ruler in the land and say something like this at their death. Not too many. His eyes were always fixed on God.

And to be honest, it's hard to know where to go with a story like Joseph because it takes up so many chapters in the Bible. But just to give you a very brief sample of his life, you can turn back to Genesis 41. This is the story, just a glimpse into the story of Joseph because it occurs after he's been sold into slavery and thrown into prison over something he didn't do. So he's at a very low point in his life at this moment. Because Genesis 41 tells us that after that took place, Pharaoh had a dream where he saw fat cows coming out of the Nile River. And then behold, seven skinny cows came and ate them up, which woke him up. The vision startled him so much that it jolted him awake until he fell back asleep. And then he had another dream where he saw seven fat ears of grain get eaten up by the by seven skinny ones that followed them, same kind of idea, which woke him up again. So he sent for the wise men to explain that to him, and they couldn't do it. Now, that may not mean much to us today, but that was a serious problem because your wise men and magicians at that time were hired for the purpose of telling you what your dreams meant. And if they couldn't do that, that means there was no purpose for them. They were supposed to be maybe killed or thrown in jail, which is probably what was going to happen until the cup bearer spoke up. And he told Pharaoh about the time he was in prison, and he met a man named Joseph who could interpret his dreams. And this is what happens next. If you look in verse 14, of the chapter, it says,

Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph,

and he told him everything I just described to you. But if you look down in verse 25, it says,

Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same." God has told to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one and the same. The seven lean and ugly cows that came after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine. It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine

will ravage the land... Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

And then further down in verse 38.

Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do you homage.

Now, again, these are all just surveys of these people's lives. But as you read that, I want you to point out how many times Joseph mentions the name God in here. He does it five times. He repeats his name over and over and over again. If you look in verse 16, he says God will give a favorable answer. Then in verse 25, he says God has told Pharaoh what he will do. Then in verse 28, God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. Then in verse 32, the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. In other words, Joseph says, "God will do it, God will do it, God will do it. The Lord will answer. The Lord will answer. It's not about me; it's about Him." Because the idea here is that Joseph never lost his faith in God.

After all these years and all this suffering and all this pain, he never gave up his confidence that the Lord was sovereign and in control. In fact, if you put yourself into this setting here, Joseph said this to a man who thought he was God. The historians tell us Pharaoh believed he was a descendant of the sky god, Horus. And as such, he made people worship him. Pharaoh had his own priests; he had his own religion. And Joseph says, "Nevertheless, Pharaoh, I'm not going to worship you as God; I'm going to worship Him as God because just to be honest, you can't even interpret your own dreams. I'm not going to give you glory. You don't even know what your visions mean." That's quite a thing to say, especially when you're a slave coming out of a dungeon. But Joseph did that here to remind you that suffering doesn't have to destroy your faith. It can make it stronger if you respond to it the right way.

In fact, there's a statement in here that sheds a lot of light on Joseph suffering. If you look in verse 14, it says that, "Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh." And if you're wondering why Joseph did that, it was because he couldn't come to Pharaoh in his condition because he was too filthy. So they had to bathe him first. He was in prison for 13 years, and the idea is that in all that time, he might have never shaved before or worn any decent clothing. He had rags like every other prisoner. So when the official sent for him and they looked at him, and they said, "You can't come to Pharaoh like this; you're a mess." So they gave him a makeover. But even in spite of that, the first thing out of his mouth when he meets Pharaoh, is the he wanted to brag about God. He had his mind fixed on Him the whole time.

Which is an interesting thing to think about because if you put all these stories together, you discover that Joseph had it harder than Isaac did. And yet his faith was greater, wasn't it? And he had it way worse than Jacob. Jacob was free, while he was enslaved. Jacob had independence, while he was in chains, and yet he had so much stronger confidence in the Lord. Because your faith doesn't depend on your circumstances. Your walk with God doesn't depend on your surroundings. You can trust God if you're a slave, amen? And you can hope in Him even if you're in a prison cell.

Another lesson you learn here from this man, is that Joseph's faith was consistent as well, while theirs was not either. I mean, Isaac and Jacob, they had high points and low points in their faith. They were on again, off again type of people, at least Jacob was anyway; he walked with God one moment, the next moment, he's in sin. Joseph seemed to be pretty steady because when you put all these patriarchs together, you find out that the issue of faith or the way faith works out is not the same in everybody's life. There's similar principles, but everybody's got a different testimony. Jacob's faith didn't look like Joseph's faith. Joseph's faith didn't look like Isaac's faith because it was a personal thing. It's made on an individual basis. And so there's a great variety in the way it flushes itself out.

I mentioned this because I've had a lot of people ask me throughout the years, "Pastor Jeremy, why doesn't my testimony look like somebody else's? Why is it so different? Because I can't tell when I was saved. And I don't know the moment that I believe, like that person." Does anybody relate to that? And I've said, "That's okay because the issue is, do you believe now? That's what God cares about?" The whole point is do you trust in Him today? Because if you do, then you're saved. Other ones have asked, "Well, why isn't my testimony more exciting? Why didn't I see a vision of a ladder reaching to heaven? And why didn't I have a Damascus Road experience? I just grew up in Sunday school. And I believed; that's not flashy." Well, the answer is because that's their story, not yours. Just be grateful for the work that God has done in your life because everyone's testimony has a unique place for it. You see this here because no matter where you look in the Hall of Faith, you find each of these people had a different experience with the Lord. And the Lord still saved them and that's all that mattered at the end of the day.

You know, next week, we're going to look at the life of the next person in the Hall of Faith. And that's Moses. And we're going to see that he had a different story as well because he was the great Redeemer of Israel. Moses is the one that God used to rescue the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. When he first met them, they're slaves. And when he died, they were ready to conquer the promised land because he had faith. The Lord used him that way. So please come back and join us for that; it should be good. But for now, let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for the testimony of these men. And as we finish studying their lives, there's always more to say. This is always just a brief taste of what You've done in years and years and years of human experience. But it reminds us Father that the faith they had is a faith that we can

share as well. And You can use fallen people like an Isaac, and Jacob, and even a Joseph and do wonderful things. And You can do that same thing through the body of Christ today, Lord.

As I think about our congregation, and our own experiences, Lord, we all struggle. And we have our on again, off again, type of moments. There's days, Lord, we feel like we could do anything for You. There's other moments when we feel like we can't do the simplest of things. And yet, that's where faith comes into play. Lord, You are a God that's bigger than us. You're a God who can do great things with little people. And so we pray, Father, that You would do that in our lives today.

Lord, when we think about something like getting a building, or when we think about building ministry, and when we think about pouring into people's lives and being unified, and walking this road together as Grace Fellowship Church, there are days when it's daunting, and we don't know how it's going to work out. But Father, we do trust in You. And we know that You're a God who has more power than we could even imagine to accomplish Your purposes. We pray You would do that in us today. We pray that whatever happens in our lives, in the life of the church, it would be such as that You would be the only one that will get glory from it.

When I think of Jacob or Joseph or Isaac, I think there's only one way that these men could have been remembered in the thousands of years of human history, and that's You. You're the one who took them and did wonderful things. Would that be a reminder to us today and encourage us in our walk with You? May Christ be glorified in the life of His church? And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.