

58-11-04.wpd --Faith Sees Beyond Death
 faith, prophecy, blessing, touch, death, future
 Heb 11:20-22

Christian faith treats the future not as a *possibility*, but as a *reality*.

INTRODUCTION: (read **text**)

--From early childhood, we're taught that *tomorrow is uncertain*, that the *future is unknown*. Christian faith alters that perception. We say, "*I may not know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.*"--
 "*The future is as bright as the promises of God.*"

--The "Faith Chapter," uses the faith of OT saints about the future to encourage our own faith. Often they had little visible evidence to go on. They had what God said He would do, and they took Him at His word. Christ brought proof about God's plan for the future. We now have evidence that human resurrection and nature's restoration aren't just *dreams*, but *certainties*. Christ's miracles revealed the power that will renew creation. His bodily resurrection foreshadowed our own.

HOM.idea. Like the OT saints, our **faith sees beyond death** (title).

I. Isaac Believed in God's Promise to His Father Abraham

- A. Isaac was there when God tested Abraham's faith in His promise. (He knew in a personal way the level of faith God desires in us.)
- B. When old and blind, and nearing death, Isaac wanted to bless his firstborn son Esau according to God's yet unfulfilled promise, but Jacob deceitfully stole that blessing.
 1. The blessing meant for Esau, which Jacob stole, was (Gen 27:28-29) "May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness-- an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples 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 those who bless you be blessed." (It was the *right* blessing, with the *right* faith, and really on the *right* person, but *without the right* understanding....)
 2. The blessing given by faith to Esau, when Isaac realized Jacob's trick, was actually the right one for Esau: (Gen 27:39-40), "Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck." (Not a nice blessing, but since Esau had earlier sold his birthright to Jacob

for a bowl of soup, he showed his lack of faith in God's promise, (Because of this, in Heb 12:16-17, Esau is called a "godless person... who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.)

3. Isaac finally blessed Jacob by faith in full understanding of what he was doing-- (Gen 28:3-4), "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham."

TRANS: Faith isn't based on full understanding. Understanding grows with time, as it did with Isaac. As a boy, he grabbed God's promise and *by faith* held on tight all his life. Life taught him much, but as death was nearing, he saw the future even more clearly, not as a possibility, but as a reality. In the end, he also saw that his blessing fell on the *right* son.

II. Despite His Trials, Jacob's Held Fast to God's Promise

- A. Jacob (later named *Israel*), started out as a deceiver, but he ended up suffering deceit [by his uncle Laban, by his own sons, even by Joseph, inadvertently]. Yet as an old man, crippled by age, he still held on firmly to God's promise-- **v.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.*
- B. Early church fathers saw in this verse two predictions of the Cross:
 1. *First*, when Israel worshiped while leaning on his wooden staff, it represented a trust in the fulfillment of the Promise, which would occur as his descendent, Jesus, hung from a wooden tree.
 2. *Second*, he made the sign of the cross when he blessed Joseph's sons-- Gen 48:13-14. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. (This disturbed Joseph, but Israel insisted prophetically that how he blessed them was exactly what the future held for them.)

TRANS: Jacob's blessing on Joseph's two sons, showed supernatural insight. Blind Jacob *by faith* saw the reality of the future in the next

generation. If the church fathers were right, he may have seen beyond, to the very Cross. Regardless of that, what he *did* see as the future is now history, and his faith in what was not yet seen is the kind of faith we are to have as we await the promises of God that are yet unfulfilled. They are not just possibilities or probabilities. They are God's realities.

III. Joseph's Faith Was Undistracted by Life's "Downs and Ups"

- A. Joseph was a dreamer whose "downs" came before the "ups" he dreamed about. (He made to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, a great statement about God's providential care in midst of life's injustices-- Gen 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.")
- B. Joseph saw *the future* in dreams, but we don't learn of his faith in *the future promised by God* to Abraham until the end of his life, and then we have v.22, *By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.*
 1. Life was good for Joseph in Egypt, as far as fame and fortune, but as he neared death, the Egyptian *good life* became much less valuable, and *his faith in God's promise* of much greater concern.
 2. Joseph knew that Egypt was not the land of Israel's promised blessing. There would have to be a future exodus.
 3. In "ups and downs," Egyptian life was an "up" for Joseph [next in power to Pharaoh himself], but as he approached death, *by faith* he "*gave instructions*" that his bones were to be carried from Egypt back to Canaan, where the promise of God was to be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION:

--**Christian faith treats the future not as possibility, but as reality.**

As these three men neared the end of life's journey, their faith in the fulfillment of God's promises became more real, more important. If that's what aging does, then old age deserves our spiritual welcome.

--Not all see the future that way. Not all have the hope of what Christ bought for us on the Cross: pardon for sin and salvation from sin's destruction. Those are negative blessings. What about the positives?

His death also bought back the earth and our human destiny in the universe. That's the future, a reality that will make this life in retrospect look like a dream. The joy of the Gospel is that we can awaken to that reality now... by faith in God's Son, who holds the key to that future.

Heb 11:20-22 (NIV) By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. {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. {22} By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.