

Joseph's Steadfast Faith

Hebrews 11:22

Halifax: 5 November 2023

Introduction:

Today we will pick up our sermon series from Hebrews again.

- We have had special sermons for a couple of weeks, so it is good to get back.

Currently, we are in Hebrews chapter 11 where we are given examples of faith from the Old Testament.

- These examples show us about faith, how it works, and what it does.
- It is very helpful for us to have these examples—they are given to encourage us and strengthen our faith—they commend faith to us.

Today we come to the last of the patriarchs who were before Moses: Joseph.

- He gives us a remarkable example of steadfast faith—constancy of faith throughout his whole life.
- He is quite different from his father Jacob in this regard. For most of his life, Jacob's faith needed to be refined, and we saw how God did refine him and his faith so that when he died, his faith was purified.
- It is interesting to observe how miserable Jacob was compared to Joseph even though Joseph actually had more trials that he might have complained about.
 - Joseph sailed through all of his troubles with the Lord, but Jacob brought many of his troubles on himself and did not have the comfort of walking through them in close fellowship with the Lord.
 - Both of them were certainly believers and will be in heaven, but Joseph had a much happier passage through this world, despite his greater trials.

The passage in Hebrews about Joseph is very short—and obscure if you don't know the background story.

- The Hebrew believers to whom Hebrews was written did know the background story, so the writer writes to them with that in mind.
- All he had to do was mention Joseph's name, and immediately they had the whole of his life in their mind.
 - I know that is not the case with all of you (though I could wish it were), so I will endeavour to supply some of that.

Our preaching text is only in verse 22, but I will read from verse 13. Heb 11:13.

- Here is God's Word. May God help you to receive it as His word.

Hebrews 11:13-22: These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵

And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. ¹⁷ By faith

Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only be-gotten son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” ¹⁹ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. ²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed

Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning on the top of his staff.* ²² By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

Since the goal of Hebrews 11 is to strengthen our faith, I will endeavour to show you what we can learn from Joseph’s example.

I. Joseph shows us that believers can be steadfast in faith throughout their whole lives.

A. The opening words, “By faith Joseph, when he was dying...” show us that he ended well.

1. This is very encouraging when you know how well Joseph lived.
 - It is a reminder that he lived in faith and that he died in faith.
 - He died as he had lived!
 - In contrast, it is disturbing to see someone like Judas who seems to be strong in faith but does not die in faith.
 - Those who have true saving faith will continue to the end because God promises to keep them, but many believers are not so steady.
 - It is especially heartening to see those few examples of those who were steadfast from start to finish.
 - Paul was like that after his conversion, and as far as we know Timothy was like that from childhood (though we are not told how he died).
 - We might think of Anna and Simeon, who rejoiced when Jesus was born.
 - We should not envy these faithful saints or say that we cannot relate to them, but rather give thanks for them and seek to imitate them.
2. We live in a time and culture that has become very inclined to make excuses.
 - a. It is, among us, an accepted thing to do. We even boast about our weakness, not as Paul did so that he trusted in God, but as if our failure to trust God is understandable.
 - We need to recognise that someone who lives consistently in faith is actually someone who knows their weakness better than someone who doesn’t.
 - The reason for their constancy is that they know how weak they are and trust in the Lord. They lean on Him.
 - b. But in our day, we will excuse ourselves from serving God on account of the way we were treated by others, on account of the hard things we have had to bear, because we were weary, or whatever.
 - But hard things are not excuses for a lack of faith!
 - They are times when we ought to have trusted God—but instead relied on ourselves or on something else that was just as useless.

- In fact, the hard things are actually opportunities for us in our weakness to lean on the Lord!
3. Let me advise you, instead of making excuses to “explain” why you failed, repent for not trusting in the Lord.
 - You failed because you did not trust Him.
 - And don’t say that you were too weak to trust in Him.
 - Say that you were too proud to trust in Him.
 - If you knew how weak you were, you would have trusted in Him.
- B. Let’s look at how Joseph trusted God under every kind of test.
- He could have had all kinds of excuses for sinning, but instead, when he was tested, he trusted in his Saviour and Lord.
 1. As a child, he had the trial of being persecuted as a prophet.
 - He had prophetic dreams.
 - They were dreams where his brothers and even his parents were bowing down to him.
 - They would not like to hear his dreams and their interpretation which he got from God.
 - The temptation for him would be to keep these dreams to himself, but he faithfully proclaimed—which brought glory to God when they were later fulfilled.
 - But his brothers hated him.
 - His father showed extreme favouritism to Joseph, partly because he was trustworthy and his brothers were not, but largely because Jacob had married more than one wife and Joseph was the son of his favoured wife.
 - Many adults make the excuse that they are the way they are because their siblings were shown favouritism, but often it was because they were difficult and deceitful children.
 - And actually, showing favouritism is a great temptation. Many children who are shown favouritism end up being the worst adults.
 2. When Joseph became a young man, he suffered abuse from the hands of his jealous brothers!
 - It was the kind of abuse that would make anyone bitter against God if they did not turn to Him in faith as a gracious Saviour.
 - What did his brothers do to him?
 - They grabbed him with violence, stripped him, and proceeded to leave him in a pit to die until they saw a caravan going to Egypt and realised that they could make a profit if they sold him as a slave.
 - Joseph was only 17 at that time!
 - You can imagine the kind of abuse that Joseph would have gotten from the slave traders—putting him in chains, abusing him in various ways, and then likely being sent to labour to exhaustion under the hot Egyptian sun.

- And remember, Joseph was coming from a wealthy household where he had special comforts.
 - Here he was, away from his father, away from those who feared God, away from family worship... without any accountability or encouragement to be faithful to God.
 - What 17-year-old would not rebel under such conditions?
 - The 17-year-old who trusts in the Lord!
 - Joseph, instead of turning sullen and rebellious, turned to the Lord and sought, by His grace, to glorify Him as a slave by being faithful to his master.
 - When his master, a wealthy and high-ranking Egyptian, saw how loyal Joseph was, he raised him to a high rank among his servants and put him in charge of everything.
 - Being abused is no excuse for bitterness. Joseph continued to live for God.
- Soon, another trial came.
3. Since Joseph was often in the house, it was not long until another temptation came.
- The Scripture says, Gen 39:7: **And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."**
 - Since his master, Potiphar, was a high-ranking Egyptian, it is almost certain that he would have had a beautiful and fashionable wife.
 - Joseph was likely in his twenties and would have been subject to youthful lusts—likely he had noticed her beauty and likely she had not been careful to maintain any modesty around him.
 - Joseph was far from his people and there was little prospect of marriage for him.
 - But we are told how, by faith, Joseph responded:
 - **Gen 39:8-10: But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. 9 *There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"* 10 So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her.**
 - Being tempted is no excuse for sin. Joseph looked to the Lord in faith.
4. But what reward did Joseph get for his faithfulness? Prison!
- Potiphar's wife accused him of trying to rape her.
 - Potiphar likely did not believe her (he knew his wife and he knew Joseph), but the situation required him to at least put Joseph in prison—which he did.
 - So now Joseph might say, "I tried to do the right thing, and this is the reward I get," but instead Joseph sought to honour God in prison.
 - Soon, he was put in charge of the prison—though still as a prisoner.
 - But soon another trial comes. The trial of disappointment.

5. Some of Pharaoh's chief servants are put in prison, and we see how Joseph treats them with kindness and compassion.
 - They are troubled because they have had dreams that were prophetic—and Joseph finds this out and interprets the dreams—telling the butler that he would be restored to favour and the baker that he would be executed.
 - Joseph asks the butler to remember him when he is restored and to tell Pharaoh of how he was able to interpret their dreams, explaining that he was wrongly put in prison. The butler says he will, but does not.
 - Joseph is left in prison for two more years. He is now 30 years old.
 - Here is the temptation of having his hopes up and being sorely disappointed.
 - But he continued to live for the glory of God. He continued to trust the Lord.

6. Soon a very different kind of test comes to Joseph. A temptation to boast.
 - Pharaoh has a dream that no one can interpret.
 - The chief butler remembers Joseph and how he had interpreted his dream and soon Joseph is brought before Pharaoh.
 - It is not easy to come from prison before a king, especially when you desperately want him to let you out of prison.
 - Would Joseph hide his relationship with God, or would he boldly speak of the LORD? The temptation would be to boast.
 - Look at what happens when Joseph is brought before him.
 - **Gen 41:15-16: And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and *there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it.*”¹⁶ So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “*It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*”**
 - As with Potiphar's wife, right from the start, Joseph establishes that he belongs to God and does what he does by His enabling.
 - Joseph does not give in to the temptation to hide his fellowship with God.

7. Then another temptation comes. The temptation of prosperity.
 - Joseph faithfully interprets Pharaoh's dream—declaring that God has shown Pharaoh that there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine.
 - Pharaoh immediately elevates Joseph to the highest rank in Egypt next to himself to carry out a plan of action to save Egypt from the effects of the famine.
 - This is, perhaps, the greatest temptation that Joseph has yet faced—
 - Many who are able to endure suffering are unable to endure prosperity and success.
 - But by faith, Joseph takes up this new task for the glory of God.

- It is not really that prosperity itself destroys us, but it is pride in supposing that we do not need the Lord now that we are flourishing.
8. Yet another temptation came when Joseph's brothers came to Egypt looking for food in the famine. The temptation to take vengeance into his own hands.
- Joseph had authority to do whatever he wanted with them.
 - After what they had done to him, he might have arrested them and had them all executed—or put into slavery themselves.
 - But instead, he employs his great wisdom to lead them to repentance.
 - Then, after that work is done, he makes himself known to them and receives them all into Egypt under his care and protection and provision.
 - He saves them from the famine and provides for them when he might have destroyed them. He could have even argued that the LORD had put in a position where he could indeed have done that lawfully.
 - But instead, he uses that authority to do good to them.
 - Those who have faith are merciful and forgiving to those who have wronged them.

TRANS> So you see what I meant when I said that Joseph was a man who shows us that a believer can be steadfast in his faith from the cradle to the grave,

- despite abuse and hardship of every sort.
 - There is no place for excuses when we have a Saviour to trust who is able to save.
- Now let's look at the second thing that we learn from Joseph's faith as it is described in Hebrews 11.

II. Joseph's faith on his deathbed shows us that a steadfast believer's great interest is in God's promises.

A. What was on Joseph's mind when he was on his deathbed?

1. Did he boast about his many achievements in Egypt?
 - He had spent more than half his life as man of great authority and importance, as a prince in Egypt.
 - He could have boasted about all that he had done.
 - He had, no doubt, acquired a great estate and a great inheritance in Egypt.
 - He was able to give houses and lands to his children and to his brothers, and he might have spoken about that.
2. But this was not the thing that was on his mind.
 - His eye was on the promise of Israel's deliverance!
 - that after a period of suffering in Egypt, the Lord would bring his family—the sons of Abraham—to the land that God had promised to Abraham.
 - His faith was not just something he decided to believe into existence...
 - It was faith in what God had promised.
 - Gen 15:13-14: **Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is not theirs*, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions."**

- Joseph was certain that God would deliver Israel from Egypt because God had promised that He would.
- 3. Why was Joseph so interested in this promise when he had such great possessions in Egypt and wouldn't even be alive when it came?
 - Why would he, an Egyptian prince, want to go to Canaan with his ragtag family who had so mistreated him?
 - Did he think they would find greater riches there than what he had in Egypt?
 - Joseph recognised that Canaan was the place where the Lord was going to gather those He had reconciled to Himself.
 - They would be the people who were in His kingdom, who have Him as their God, who live before Him as a people of faith, and who will inherit eternal life in God's house.
 - It did not matter so much what they look like now or how they are esteemed in the world
 - His treasure was not in this world but in the city whose builder and maker is God, eternal in the heavens.
 - Joseph had faith in God's eternal blessing.
 - Egypt could not tempt him, nor could Potiphar's wife, nor could he give himself up to bitterness or resentment because of past abuses and disappointments because his eye was on God's promises.
 - Joseph lived for God because he believed that an inheritance with God was the only inheritance that really mattered!
 - He'd rather be with the church in Canaan as one who was destined to inherit glory than to be in Egypt with all its power and wealth.

B. What about you?

1. Where is your treasure? That is where your heart is also.
 - What do you make mention of? What do you talk about?
 - What is of great importance to you?
 - What people do you most identify with?
2. Would you rather be with God's people, though there are not many noble or many mighty or many impressive ones or many of great wealth in this world...
 - Or would you prefer to be with sons and daughters of this world who have their portion in this life?

C. The Lord has given us a two-fold promise now as He did then.

1. There was/is the promise of the visible church—His people gathered to Him in this world, preserved by Him, disciplined by Him, testifying of Him.
 - For them it was Canaan; for us it is the church gathered in every place under the profession of the gospel.
 - We identify with a persecuted, lowly people who God preserves as His own.
 - The glory of the church on earth is not in her present condition—it is in her association with God and His salvation.
 - If you do not glory in that, you have no interest in the church.

- I said there is a two-fold promise that God has given us...
 - First that He will preserve His church here in this world...
- 2. The second side of the promise is the promise of an eternal city.
 - That He will bring us to glory in heaven—that is, in His presence.
 - Jesus who came to redeem us calls us to come to Him for salvation and eternal life.
 - He promises resurrection and eternal life in His house to us.
- 3. So do you see how the two aspects of the promise go together?
 - God brings those He is bringing to glory into the visible church.
 - We come by faith to the place where He gathers His people—where we profess Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and He keeps us and preserves and uses us to spread His gospel and be a blessing in the world until He brings us to glory when Jesus returns.

TRANS> Now we come to something else that Joseph's faith shows us.

III. Joseph shows us that those who believe seek the good of others—they seek to point them God and to His promises.

- A. Look at how earnest he is to make sure that his kindred embrace God's promise.
1. First, that Joseph makes mention of this promise to them.
 - a. Keeping his faith to himself was not an option for him!
 - He wants them to embrace the promise too.
 - He wants to keep the promise alive with them.
 - b. People of faith are like that.
 - Sometimes they are accused being pushy—but how can we help it when we have such a treasure to inherit that others might inherit with us!
 - And not only that, we enjoy speaking to each other about the things that we treasure most.
 - c. Genesis 50:24 shows that he was thinking of them.
 - Gen 50:24: **And Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”**
 - With what certainty he speaks! “Though I, your protector and provider, am going away, God will visit you at the appointed time and bring you to the land He promised.”
 - He speaks so that they might believe the promise.
 - He speaks so that they will be assured of God's promise through the hard times that they are going to face before the promise is fulfilled.
 - That's what believers do! They encourage each other to continue in the faith to the end!
 - Joseph does something else as well.
 2. Second, Joseph comes up with a clever way to keep God's promise before his family until it is fulfilled.

- He makes them swear that when God brings them out, they will take his bones and bury them in Canaan with their fathers.
 - **Gen 50:23-26: Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.”²⁶ So Joseph died, *being* one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.**
- Throughout all those years that they were in Egypt after Joseph was gone, even being brought under bondage in Egypt,
 - Joseph’s bones would have been there as a testimony that the Lord would surely visit them according to His promise.
 - There would be times when they would be tempted to lose heart and to despair concerning God’s promise, but there would be Joseph’s bones—reminding them that God was going to bring them out.

B. If you have true saving faith, you will seek to lead others to trust in God too.

1. You will tell them of your hope in the promises of God. You will tell them what He has done.
 - a. You will tell everyone.
 - 1) You will tell unbelievers that God will surely visit them if they will repent and turn to Him for salvation—deliverance from sin that they might serve God.
 - Jesus shed His blood and if they put themselves in His hands, He will deliver them.
 - 2) You will tell your children of His promises and that He will visit them if they will seek Him.
 - 3) You tell those in the church that God will surely visit us.
 - He promises to visit us when we gather to worship.
 - He promises to visit us in our time of need—when we are faced with trials and temptations—and He will help us if we are not too proud to ask.
 - He promises to visit the church, sometimes after years or even decades or centuries of waiting, but He will visit us to restore us and to multiply us.
 - He promises that He will visit us at the end of the world to bring us to His house forever.
2. Like Joseph, you will also find ways to help others remember His promises.
 - You will encourage them to go to church and to partake of the sacraments.
 - You will give them books and Bibles.
 - You will help to establish faithful churches.
 - You will maintain family worship in your home along with catechising, and you encourage your children to do the same with their children.
 - You will do what you can to see that the promises of God stay with them.

Conclusion: So let us learn from Joseph’s example.

- Let us be steadfast about trusting God—about leaning on Him so that we might go on for Him.
- Let us keep God’s promises as our greatest treasure.

- And let us encourage each other to trust in His promises and to remember them.