

Cultivating a Heroic Faith

Part 7

Isaac, Jacob & Joseph

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Note: For each of the following questions, refer to the **Sermon Summary** inside.

Observation—*What do I see?*

- What cultural significance did the firstborn son have in Isaac's time, and what pattern of "younger over older" does the sermon highlight?
- What prophecy did God give Rebekah before the twins were born (Genesis 25:23) and then how did both Isaac and Jacob reverse expected birth order in their blessings?
- What acts of faith are attributed to Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph in Hebrews 11:20–22?

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- What do Isaac's blessing of Jacob "regarding things to come" and Jacob's act of worship while leaning on his staff reveal about faith?
- How do Rebekah and Jacob illustrate the danger of pursuing God's will through sinful means, and how does the inclusion of Isaac and Jacob in Hebrews 11 address the issue of moral failure?
- What theological theme connects Isaac, Jacob and Joseph?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- How should I respond when others act wrongly toward me and when I'm tempted to accomplish good goals through questionable methods?
- Do I **really** believe that my past failures don't disqualify me from usefulness to God?
- In what ways am I tempted to "retire" spiritually rather than persevere in faith, and what promises of God should shape my decisions when I'm tempted to "slide for home"?
- How can I intentionally bless the next generation?

Sermon Summary

Isaac, Jacob and Joseph represent three generations of Abraham's family. Each of them did something near the end of their lives that positively impacted the future of countless generations. Hebrews 11:20 refers to the blessings Isaac conferred upon his two sons, Jacob and Esau, in the last days of his life. Isaac was concerned about the continuation of the promises God had made to his father, Abraham. He knew that he had the responsibility to pass along the blessing which he himself had received from his father. At this point Isaac is in his twilight years, and he desperately wanted his faith to become the faith of his children and grandchildren. In His sovereignty, God had ordained that the younger son, Jacob, would receive the birthright (Genesis 25:23). Because of his failing eyesight and Rebekah's deception, Isaac was fooled. He mistook Jacob for Esau, and blessed Jacob, just as the Lord said that he would (Genesis 27:21-23).

Rebekah's actions had a negative impact on Jacob. Like his mother, Jacob became a deceiver. And in response to Esau's anger, Jacob fled from his home to preserve his life. Even though the right person got the blessing (God intended for Jacob to receive the birthright), we need to remember that it is never justified for us to do a bad thing in order to accomplish a good thing. But in His sovereignty, God is able to incorporate our wrong, sinful choices into His perfect plan. Many times, we can look back over our life and see how God managed to weave our errors into the beautiful tapestry He is making out of our lives (Romans 5:20). The blessing Isaac bestowed upon Jacob was incredibly significant (Genesis 27:28-29). It is no wonder that Esau wept when he realized that Jacob had taken all that was his by right of his birth.

How could God honor Isaac's blessing of Jacob when Isaac thought he was blessing another person—his son Esau? God is so sovereign that He can use people's sinful choices to bring about His purposes. How could God bless Jacob and initiate him into the Hall of Faith when he was a master of deception? Not sure - but we do know that ultimately, the oldest son, Esau, received a blessing from Isaac. We also know that Jacob ended up paying dearly for his trickery by getting an education in trickery from his father-in-law, Laban, for whom he worked more than 20 years. Jacob learned that what goes around comes around—that what you sow, you reap. From both Isaac and Jacob's life, we are reminded that our failures do not ban us from receiving God's ultimate approval.

Verse 21 of Hebrews 11 focuses on Jacob's last days. Leaning on his staff, a man who had been marked and humbled by God, Jacob worshipped the Lord and passed on his blessings to his grandsons. Joseph brought his two sons to Jacob in order that they might receive their grandfather's blessing. Manasseh was the firstborn—the older, and Ephraim was the younger (Genesis 48). But when Jacob blessed the boys, he crossed his arms and placed his right hand upon Ephraim (the younger) and his left hand upon Manasseh (the older)—the exact opposite of what Joseph expected. What gave Jacob the right to defy nature, and reverse the positions of the two boys? Someone has said that it was nothing less than the cross of Jesus Christ. Jacob crossed his hands when he deliberately placed his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can set aside your first birth and give you a second one! Human nature can never reverse human nature, but God can "rebirth" you and bless you with a second chance. Jacob went out with worship in his heart, blessing on his lips, and power in his hands. Instead of looking back and remembering all of his failures, Jacob looked ahead at what God could do through his grandsons and reached out and blessed them.

Looking at Joseph, Hebrews 11:22 essentially says that when Joseph was dying, he mentioned two things: (1) the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt and (2) where he wanted his bones to be buried. This is noteworthy because in spite of spending his young adult years in a pagan country, he never forgot who he was, and where he belonged. His heart had never stopped beating for his homeland, the Land of Promise (Genesis 50:24-25). When the day of the Hebrews' deliverance finally arrived and Moses led them out of slavery and into the land of Canaan, Joseph's request was granted (Exodus 13:19). Based upon Hebrews 11, Joseph is remembered as a man of faith because of the long-term perspective he had of God's faithfulness. His dying request would have been an amazing encouragement to his brothers and their families. He was saying, "One day God will bring us back to our homeland, and you are going to take me with you!" Joseph's dying request was a testimony of his faith in God's promises. He believed that what God promised, He would surely bring to pass—and He did (Joshua 24:32). From Joseph we learn why faith is described as "the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). He is one of those who "died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen and having welcomed them from a distance, he was assured of them" (Hebrews 11:13).

Through Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, we are reminded that God expects us to live by faith right up until the end. Live by faith now, while being confident in God's promises concerning the future and the reward which comes to the faithful. Don't follow the example of Isaac and Rebekah who brought incredible pain and suffering into their own lives by trying to twist God's will their way. God doesn't need our help, and disobedience only produces pain. Trust God and His plan and reject the desire to "have it your way" or to "help God out". Worship God for His sovereignty, wisdom, and power. God is absolutely sovereign. Even when others try to twist events in their preferred direction, God is so wise and powerful that He does a "work around". Nothing is too difficult for God. He wants to bless you and your family—but you have to be willing to trust Him and obey Him.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

Pastor Doug extracted six lessons from the lives of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Let's see how the Book of Proverbs, which gives wisdom for living, makes those same points. Write out each of the passages listed below, followed by your own personal application.

Monday— Live by faith to the very end of your life.

Proverbs 3:5–6 _____

Proverbs 4:18 _____

My personal application: _____

Tuesday— Bless the next generation instead of withdrawing from it.

Proverbs 13:22 _____

Proverbs 20:7 _____

My personal application: _____

Wednesday— Do not try to accomplish God's will through disobedience.

Proverbs 21:3 _____

Proverbs 28:9 _____

My personal application: _____

Thursday— Trust God's sovereignty, even when people act wrongly.

Proverbs 16:9 _____

Proverbs 21:1 _____

My personal application: _____

Friday— Remember that failure does not disqualify you from God's approval.

Proverbs 24:16 _____

Proverbs 28:13 _____

My personal application: _____

Saturday— Accept the truth that what you sow, you will reap.

Proverbs 11:18 _____

Proverbs 12:14 _____

Proverbs 22:8 _____

My personal application: _____