

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

## The Characters of Faith (The Patriarchs – Part 4) Hebrews 11:17-22

*17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, as 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 exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.*

I know that I have often walked a fine line with the use of one particular adjective – a word of description, as I have stood in this pulpit. It is a word that according to Webster's means, "slow of mind, obtuse; given to unintelligent decisions or acts; or acting in an unintelligent or careless manner." If you don't know what word to which I am referring, that word is "stupid" – a word that many of us would prefer that our children not make a habit of using and yet a word that is used 12 times in the NASB's Old Testament to translate a pair of Hebrew words that describe a man or men as acting as senseless or unintelligent as a cow chewing its cud out in the field. In other words, to be "stupid" in Biblical language is to say that a person has no more sense than a cow that eats grass because that is about all the bovine mind can handle. Not very flattering. And yet the prophet Jeremiah uses this idea to describe the idolatrous nature within man, his tendency to worship anything other than the true God in both 10:14 as well as 51:17 saying -

***All mankind is stupid, devoid of knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his molten images are deceitful, and there is no breath in them.***

So, from a spiritual point of view, man, because of his refusal to acknowledge and worship God, is deemed as "stupid" – senseless and careless. With all this said however, we know that no one generally plans to be stupid; no wants to be stupid, right?. In earthly terms, while we have all done a number of "stupid" things, I am aware of very few who actually set out to be "stupid." Can you imagine the following conversations?

*"How is it that you lost your life savings?" "Oh, I wanted to be stupid so I purposely invested in a worthless company? Or, "Why is it that your house collapsed?" "Oh, yea, I wanted to be stupid so I didn't build my house with a foundation." Or, "I heard that you were in a car accident, what happened?" "Oh, I wanted to be stupid so I drove my car into a telephone pole."*

I believe such conversations would be rare because regardless (or is that irregardless since I am already treading water with the use of the word "stupid") – because regardless of whether we are considering our spiritual state or some earthly circumstance, we don't want to do "stupid" things but rather things that make sense, that have clear reason or purpose. We want things to make sense. But this tendency of ours to want to make sense of things often

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

flies in the face of true biblical faith. There is a sense in which true biblical, saving faith is actually “senseless” sometimes calling upon the believer to do or believe in things that the senses cannot fathom. In Hebrews 11:17-22 we find four examples of how faith can appear senseless and yet from these we must learn that true faith remains committed to the person, promises and provisions of God even when following Him does not make sense from an earthly point of view. So then, let us see this worked out in our text, exploring these four examples which don’t make sense apart from faith and then draw some application from each.

## I. By faith, Abraham perceived the power of God (11:17-19)

*17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;*

[Read v. 17] The account of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is recorded in Genesis 22:1-8. For anyone familiar with the story of how Abraham was called to take his son to Mount Moriah and kill him as a sacrifice, such are quite content to see the great faith of Abraham to do this and see the picture that to worship God involves sacrifice.

The truth of the matter is that this is a troubling account on the surface. When we stop to consider what Abraham was asked to do, the “**test**” or examination under which he was placed, the human response really ought to be, “this doesn’t make sense.” How could *God* command such a thing? How could *Abraham* be willing to do such a thing? And, if Isaac were killed as a sacrifice, then how would the promise of God – that through Isaac, “**his only begotten son**” – which speaks of Isaac’s uniqueness, not that he was Abraham’s only son, but that he was his only son of promise – that through Isaac, Abraham would become a great nation and possess the promised land be fulfilled? For the promise is clear as verse 18 quotes the promise from Genesis 21:12 saying, “**In Isaac your descendants shall be called.**” Would it not seem then “stupid” – senseless and careless to kill Isaac, the son of promise? For if Isaac is dead, then the promise is dead.

But then comes verse 19 and by the providence of God we are given an insight into the thinking of Abraham that was not supplied to us in the Genesis account, namely that, “**He [Abraham] considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type**” and this he did, so says our text, “**by faith.**” By faith, because of Abraham’s firm and confident trust in the person, promises and provisions of God, he “**considered**” – he reasoned, not by human intuition but by God’s revelation, that God was “**able**” (dunatos – from which we get our English word “dynamite”) – in other words, against what the world would deem sensible and reasonable, Abraham believed that God was powerful, more than capable to perform yet another miracle in his life. Abraham did not see the Lord as the God of *miracle*, but rather as the God of *miracles*. For first God gave Abraham the power to have Isaac in his old age, and now Abraham also believed that if Isaac were to be killed, that God had the power to grant resurrection – to raise not just Isaac, but whomever God desired to raise from the dead. Abraham, by faith, trusted that God had power over death and could raise the dead. This trust is remarkable when we stop to consider that up to Genesis 22 there is no mention of resurrection either promised or as having happened. But, by faith, Abraham believed that God would raise people from the dead.

---

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Ultimately, Abraham perceived the power of God to provide whatever was necessary to fulfill what was promised. In the Genesis account itself, as Abraham and Isaac are walking to Mount Moriah, Isaac asked the question in Genesis 22:7 saying, **“Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”** And what was Abraham’s response? In Genesis 22:8 Abraham says, **“God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”** Abraham believed in the power of God to provide what was needed, be that a lamb for the sacrifice or resurrection life.

How about you? Have you and do you perceive the power of God to provide all that you need? Not all that you want, but all that you need? It is sometimes easy to say yes, but do you seek to live by faith, trusting not in what you can accomplish or pull off, or manipulate toward your own end. Sometimes what God calls us to can seem “senseless” to the world. We have a couple of young men here who are pursuing full-time ministry. I know that in at least one case, unbelieving family members have questioned such a pursuit, noting that not to go to “college” could prove to be detrimental to his life’s success. But this one perceives the power of God to supply him for both life and ministry. What seems senseless to some is simply obedience to the call of God to others.

Maybe you are struggling or being challenged with the way you raise your kids. Certainly the world does not believe in training up a child in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but if this is what the Lord has commanded, do you believe that God will supply the power to so raise your kids? And while we here in the USA face very little bodily persecution, we know that around the world to profess Christ could be a death sentence, and yet multitudes of brothers and sisters in Christ make such a profession, believing and trusting in the power of God to protect them and if they should die for the cause of Christ, they perceive the glorious hope of Abraham, that God is even able to raise people from the dead. The world would count it stupid, senseless to live and die for Christ, but by God-given faith, the believer counts it gain.

Let me close this thought by citing one more verse, one of my favorites. And I would have you note something significant in 2 Peter 1 1:3 -

***seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.***

Sometimes we are tempted to think God only sufficient, only powerful enough to deal with spiritual issues, to make us godly. But did you see that the text also says that God has granted us everything pertaining to life – your zoe – your very being and life. Have you perceived God’s power in your life and in your soul? To see the hand of God in your life and receive it joyously requires faith, a trust in God, because otherwise circumstances may seem rather senseless, but we know well that God works all things, good and seemingly bad, together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

---

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

## II. By faith, Isaac perceived the providence of God (11:20)

*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.*

This leads us to our second point, that “by faith, Isaac perceived the providence of God.” [Read text]. The account of Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau is recorded for us in Genesis 27-28. Again we are to consider the familiar story here, a deceitful play was concocted by Rebekah and her son Jacob in order for Jacob to secure the blessing of the firstborn. Rebekah prepared a meal just as Isaac liked and Jacob dressed up in animal skins in order to appear before Isaac’s failing eyes as his hairy son Esau.

Let us remember that traditionally speaking, the firstborn, that would be Esau, not Jacob, received the bulk of the inheritance and prime blessing of the father. Through lying and manipulation, Jacob succeeded in stealing the blessing. But what might be troubling to us in the text is that it seem as though as soon as Isaac found out about the deceit, all he would need to do is “correct” the matter - to recant the blessing on Jacob and grant it to Esau. But he does not. In fact, with full awareness of what had happened, Genesis 27:33 states these words of Isaac, **“Yes, and he [Jacob] shall be blessed.”** And again in Genesis 28:1-4, Isaac blesses Jacob again with the promises of the blessing of Abraham.

Does this make any sense? Why would Isaac give what belonged to the firstborn to the secondborn? Our Hebrews text tells us that Isaac indeed blessed both Jacob and Esau, **“even regarding things to come”** – or more simply, “concerning the promises of God”. Up to this point in Isaac’s life, he had walked more by sight than by faith. Even though Isaac knew God’s choice of Jacob over Esau as recorded in Genesis 25:23, Isaac had intended to give Esau the blessing of Abraham. And even though Rebekah, his wife, and Jacob, his Son, sinfully and wrongfully conspired against him to obtain the blessing, Isaac, by faith, perceived the hand of God, the providence of God, the working of all circumstances and situations that God’s promises be fulfilled in God’s timing and to God’s end. To the world, Isaac may have looked senseless, but “by faith” he trusted that God had worked and would continue to work in the lives of Jacob and Esau to accomplish His own ends.

How about you? Do you perceive the providence of God in your life? Particularly when people do rotten and evil things against you? It is easy to become bitter, bitter against others and even against God when we look at difficult situations and the hurtful things people might do and fail to see that God is there with us in the midst of those time, calling us to look only to Him, exhorting us to trust Him, regardless of whether things are seemingly good or if your world is falling in around you. It is often in the difficult times that we come to see the providence of God all them more, that He is leading, He is guiding, and He is causing all thing to work for our eternal good even if that means some temporary bad.

Most of you know well Philippians 1:6 which says, **“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** Do you perceived the providence, the mighty hand of God in your life? Day in and day out, if you belong to Him, you have this promise, that regardless of how difficult, how trying the circumstances; no matter how other people might treat or mistreat you, God is bringing you to perfection, to completion. No ill-spoken words from others; and no calamity that you encounter thwarts God’s hand from completing what He has started. The world may think you foolish for enduring such things, but to the one who is walking “by faith” and not “by sight” – all such things are but momentary light affliction (2 Corinthians 4:17) in light of the promise of eternal life.

---

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

### III. By faith, Jacob perceived the purpose of God (11:21)

*By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.*

This brings us to Hebrews 11:21 and our third point, namely that “By faith, Jacob perceived the purpose of God.” [Read text]. Let me remind you of the Genesis account here before we continue. And the end of Genesis 47 and on through to the end of chapter 48, we read of Jacob’s blessing the sons of Joseph. Anyone familiar with this text knows that Jacob did something unique, strange and evidently senseless to Joseph himself. As Jacob reached out his hands to pronounce a blessing upon each of Joseph’s boys, Jacob reversed his hands, placing his right hand upon the head of the younger boy Ephraim, which would indicate the preferred blessing, and his left hand upon the older boy Manasseh.

Was this nothing more than the mistake of a senile and senseless old man? Joseph evidently thought so as he tried to correct his father, but Jacob, with full mental awareness, blessed the younger with the preferential blessing. Our text tells us that this blessing, given while he was dying, was an act of worship, of devotion and of service to God. I say to you that Jacob perceived that the purpose of his life was to be a blessing and to faithfully proclaim the will and word of God. Somehow, we are not told, Jacob knew what God’s intentions were for Ephraim and Manasseh, how the younger, like Jacob himself, would be greater than the older. It may not have made sense to anyone else, including Joseph, but Jacob, “by faith” offered the blessing in the order given. It appears that Jacob was more consumed by what God would have him do than what Joseph thought. Jacob was more focused on God’s revealed purpose than pleasing others.

I find it interesting that even when it was all Jacob could do to lean on top of his staff, he knew that he was still called to be a blessing, to give a blessing and to worship God. Oh, how we need to know this. How about you? What would you say is your purpose in life? A better question would be, “what purpose are you living out?” It is easy to say, “I should live for God and glorify Him.” But when the world thinks you have nothing to offer because you are too old, or too young or too messed up; when the world thinks it is senseless for you to be of much use for anything, will you “by faith” believe that your purpose is to glorify God in your body, to live for Him until your last dying breath, to be a vessel through which God Himself might bless others? Is this the purpose of the believer? Turn with me to 1 Peter 3:8-15 where we see this purpose in action:

***8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 10 For, THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. 11 HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. 12 FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL. 13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being***

---

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

**ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...[giving a blessing, communicating the promises of God]...**

Let us, like Jacob, perceive the purpose of God – that He has blessed us so that we might bless others.

#### **IV. By faith, Joseph perceived the promise of God (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.*

This brings us to our final point of consideration this morning as found in Hebrews 11:22, namely that “by faith, Joseph perceived the promise of God.” [Read text]. Like Jacob, when Joseph was on his deathbed, **“when he was dying”** he made evident his continued hope and trust in the person, promises and provisions of God. And just what was Joseph trusting the Lord about? Our text says that he **“made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel”** – in other words, Joseph knew the promise of God, given by revelation to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and communicated to him and to his brothers, that God was to give the land of Canaan to Israel and Joseph believed so fervently in the promises of God that he asked that his own bones, his mummy, not be left in the land of Egypt, but taken to the land of promise, the land that would belong to his people by the power, providence, and purpose of God. Listen to how the Genesis account expresses it-

#### **Genesis 50:24-25**

**24 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.” 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you [promise of God], and you shall carry my bones up from here.”**

It is remarkable to stop and consider that Joseph was taken to Egypt when he was 17 and lived there until he died at the age of 110. For 93 years Joseph dwelled in Egypt. He became great there and for all practical purposes, Egypt was all Joseph knew. There he was a man of renown. There he was popular. And yet Joseph, by faith, preferred to be buried as a nobody in the promised land than a somebody in a land destined to perish. Why, because the promise of God, the word of God was more precious to him than all that the world had to offer. It may not make sense to the world not to be honored by the world. But to be blessed by God is more important to a believer than any accolade of the world. And to most in the world, this does not make sense.

God had promised peace and prosperity for Israel as they trusted and followed Him. Do you know the promises of God? Do you know the revealed word of God? Do you trust what God has said? Let me share with you some of the promises, the truths of God’s word. I will begin with the negative and then move to the positive.

First, according to Ezekiel 18:4, the promise of God is this - **“The soul who sins will die.”** In Romans 3:23 we learn that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** and in 6:23 the promise of God is this – **“for the wages of sin is death [eternal separation**

---

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

**from the bliss and grace of God], but...[and here things turn positive] the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** And how does one partake of this free gift? According to Romans 10:9-10 the promise of God is, **“9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”** And just what does it mean to be one who “believes.” To believe is to live life “by faith” – just like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

To believe is to live according to the revealed word of God, to trust in the power of God, that He is able to save you, to trust in the providence of God, that **“when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons”** (Galatians 4:4-5).

To believe is to trust in the purpose of God, that you can rightly say with your mouth and by your life, **“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me”** (Galatians 2:20). To believe is to trust in the promises of God, that Jesus said, **“I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly”** (John 10:10b). And who are those that have this abundant life? The promise of God according to Luke 9:23 is – **“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”** Do you take this promise “by faith”? Have you taken this promise “by faith.” It may not make sense to anyone else to follow after a Savior who has not made an appearance for 2000 years, whose words seem to go against much of modern wisdom and thought – but where the world sees a senseless faith, I pray that each of us here this morning might know the truth of a saving faith – a faith that perceives the power, providence, purpose and promises of God. A faith that reveals itself by living daily for the Lord Jesus Christ. A faith that says, “though the world count me a fool, I will live for Christ, will love Christ and will worship Christ with all that I am and all that I have.” **“For the world is passing away, and also its lusts, but the one who does the will of God lives forever”** (1 John 2:17). May we be those who do the will of God – even if it makes us look stupid, so that we might bring glory to God. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

---

Copyright © 2007 Edward K. Godfrey. This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 2300 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street Rogers, AR 72758.