

BY FAITH JACOB & SONS SET A LASTING EXAMPLE

Of God's forgiveness through Christ -- Of how certain they were of God's grace through Christ.

Hebrews 11:21-22

TEXT: *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Do you know all the books of the Bible, in order? Can you still recite them?

In the days before the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to begin writing the Sacred Scriptures, what did they, the Old Testament members of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints memorize?

They memorized the lineage of the Promised Savior. It began with Adam, his son Seth, all those names listed in Genesis 5, down through Methuselah, Lamech the father of Noah, then Noah's son Shem, and then down to Terah, the father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These were the names of the Patriarchs through whom the Promise of the Savior would descend. Faithful believers in the Savior knew their ancestors, and paid close attention to what God had revealed to several of them concerning the Promise.

I'm not saying this was the case with Jacob, but many ancients carried elaborately decorated staffs, carved full of symbols and significant words. It's curious to me that Scripture would emphasize the fact that as Jacob was dying, he ***blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.*** It would not surprise me in the least to find that the staff here mentioned was carved with the line and lineage of the patriarchs God had revealed to be the ones through whom the Savior would descend. I'm just wondering. But what the portion of the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews sets before us today is the fact that they believed the Lord would keep His Promise and send that Descendant of Eve who would redeem them from their sins for eternal life in heaven. And the Apostle reminds us today in this Chapter 11 of Hebrews that Jacob and sons set a lasting example of faith: Faith in God's forgiveness through Christ; and, an example of how certain God would keep His Word.

It often troubles us when we read about the life of Jacob. Here he is listed as a man of faith, and we know that he lied to his father, cheated his brother, had four wives, twelve sons and one daughter. Jacob's life was one that had to manage one of the most dysfunctional families in Bible History. Obviously, Jacob was forgiven of his sins, for he is listed in this New Testament Epistle as a great man of faith. But how are we to deal with the fact that Jacob had four wives? Why does it seem that God "winked" at his polygamy?

But let us not become arrogant in this, because those ancients could just as easily look at our culture and its immorality of today and wonder why God doesn't do to us what he did to Sodom and Gomorrah. Doesn't the New Testament clearly say that the sexual cesspool in which our society is swimming is condemned by God? For example, Paul writes: ***Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*** 1 Co 6 The Old Testament patriarchs could easily argue in view of our modern culture, "Well, at least we took care of our wives. We did divorce them and leave them."

For the Christian, from the Old Testament patriarchs to us New Testament believers, we know that our only hope is in God. So when our text says: ***By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff...*** we are compelled to go back to the book of Genesis to read about that day when Jacob blessed his sons. When reading about that event we should put ourselves in the shoes of those sons of Jacob. They lined up for their individual blessings from the oldest to the youngest.

First son, Reuben, was called forward. Reuben's sins are recorded in Scripture, and when father Jacob blessed Reuben, it was nothing to brag about: ***Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power. Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.*** Ge 49 Next, Jacob called sons number 2 and 3: ***Simeon and Levi are brothers-- their swords are weapons of violence. ... Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.*** Ge 49 Go back and read about their sins of murder in Genesis 34.

Son #4, Judah was next. His sins are also recorded in Scripture. Sins that are shameful and

embarrassing. What would father Jacob say to him? Surely he too would be shamed, cursed and not blessed. But there is a dramatic difference concerning Judah: ***Judah, your brothers will praise you; ... The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.*** Ge 49 We recognize this as the prophecy that the Savior, Jesus, will come from Judah, and that his family line will be a ROYAL family line. The Christ of God, the Messiah, the King of heaven and Savior of the world, will descend from Judah. This is NOT because Judah earned or deserved this blessing, but that it was God's good and gracious will that Jesus would be a descendant of Judah.

Judah's brothers would praise him because they knew and believed that the Savior for their sins that brought disgrace upon them all, was indeed coming into this world. Judah deserved this blessing no more than the others. But along with Judah's brothers, we, too, praise this grace of God revealed through the Promise of Jesus, a descendant of the royal line of Judah. We know that their Savior also is our Savior.

BY FAITH JACOB & SONS SET A LASTING EXAMPLE of God's forgiveness through Christ; and, of how certain they were of God's grace through Christ. Joseph's life and final instructions to his sons illustrate this faith.

Of all Jacob's 12 sons, Joseph, number 11 in the lineup, lived the most godly life of faith. The last 13 chapters of Genesis tell us about Joseph's amazing life of faith. Yet Joseph's final days are spent emphasizing God's plan for sending the Savior into the world. Our text says: ***By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.*** Joseph's great grandfather, Abraham, had been told by God that his descendants, the people chosen by God to be the people through whom the Savior would come, would be slaves in a strange land. God said to grandpa Abraham: ***Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.*** Ge 15 Joseph knew and believed that God had used him as the instrument to settle Israel in Egypt, and that after 400 years, God would lead them out of Egypt to the Promised land. His brother Judah would be the instrument through whom the Savior would come. Joseph would be the instrument in God's fulfillment of the prophecy of the Exodus out of Egypt. So Joseph ***gave instructions about his bones.*** Joseph would be dead by that time, but by faith in God's promise he demanded: Take my bones with you to the Promised Land where someday, the Savior will be born!

Joseph was certain about God's promise of eternal life in heaven. His demand to carry his mummified body out of Egypt to Canaan was his testimony of this faith. What kind of example does your faith and worship demonstrate to others? Through all of your life's ups and downs, do you continue to look forward to the day when you can leave this world to be united with Christ and the Church Triumphant?

Both Jacob and Joseph could have asked many times, "Why does this happen to me?" Both would have answered: "Why shouldn't it? I am a poor miserable sinner!" It was Jacob who prayed: ***I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.*** Ge 32 Some of their sufferings were of their own doing, and the consequences of their sins. Some of the sufferings were part of God's plan and purpose, their personal crosses given them to bring glory to the Lord. Yet, by faith, they set the example of how God's forgiveness of sins through Jesus gives us the certainty to know that we are someone God has redeemed and forgiven through Jesus.

What if Judgment Day would be conducted in the same manner in which Jacob lined up his sons, and one by one recalled their sins? That would my death a most terrifying thing to consider! But like Judah, the one through whom the Savior would descend, each of us can know that God has forgiven our sins and remembers them no more. We can live and die like Joseph who knew where his bones were going after he died: to the Promised Land of heaven! Amen.