

And so we carry on our summer journey through Hebrews 11 arriving at Isaac.

But let's gain our perspective again by dipping into Hebrews 12 to remind ourselves what the writer wants us to learn from chapter 11.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NLT)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

We're looking at the lives of these historical characters to see how they wrestled with God, to see how they became grounded in their faith in God. On one hand they stand as examples for us as we seek to strengthen our faith. But on the other hand they point us towards Jesus who lived a perfect faith, who had a perfect walk with the father, and who instills in us the desire and power to do the same.

And so we come to our text for today.

Hebrews 11:20 (NLT)

It was by faith that Isaac promised blessings for the future to his sons, Jacob and Esau.

It's interesting that Isaac is included in this list of people of faith because we don't often think of him in that way. If we're looking for great passages on faith we're likely to look up Moses and Noah, Abraham and Sarah, David and Esther, but Isaac's name wouldn't usually come up. In fact we might be hard pressed to figure out what we can learn from Isaac at all. There aren't a lot of stories about him and even in the stories we do have he's many an innocent bystander.

In fact his greatest claim to fame is that he's one of the patriarchs of the Israelite nation.

The Patriarchs:

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

He fits in there nicely between Abraham his dad and Jacob his son.

We know a lot about Abraham and we know a lot about Jacob, but Isaac, not so much.

One thing we do know is that God likes numbers. In scripture he repeats important numbers. The most common we know is 7. 7 days of creation, 7 festivals in God's calendar, 7 lamps in the tabernacle and temple and 7 lamp stands in the book of Revelation. 7 carries the idea of completeness and perfection.

The number 3 is also very common. The great beings in the presence of God are recorded in both the old and new testaments as crying out Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD. Abraham encounters three men on their way to judge Sodom. There are a number of references to

something being dead for three days. When Jesus was going to do special teaching about the Messianic Kingdom he would often teach to Peter, James and John. And it was those three that saw Jesus when he was transfigured and they saw Jesus, Moses and Elisha talking together.

The number 3 is often used to indicate something about God himself. And that comes as no surprise since God has revealed himself as a triune God of Father, Son and Spirit.

Although all three persons of the this Unity are clearly presented in the old testament, it's really in the new testament that they are listed as Father, Son and Spirit. With that in mind we can look back and see that in some cases where three things are mentioned, sometimes the middle one has special messianic significance, it has a special connection to Jesus.

So let's test that theory.

We have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, three patriarchs. At first glance it sounds like an historical statement. These are the ancestors of Israel.

By Jesus' day the statement 'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' had taken on a greater meaning, a hopeful meaning. Instead of just sharing a lineage, these three men had each received a direct promise from God that through them all nations on the earth would be blessed. For the Hebrew scholars this was a clear reference to the Messiah, the one who would restore justice and peace and rule the world with mercy.

Sounds good so far. Let's look closer at the middle of the 3.

The Life of Isaac
in 4 acts

The Mission of Jesus
in 4 acts

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1: Birth | 1: Birth |
| promise / miracle / controversy | |
| 2: The Binding | 2: The Cross |
| hill / father / wood / death & resurrection | |
| 3: Rebekah | 3: The Bride |
| servant / gifts / preparations | |
| 4: The Sons (Heb 11) | 4: FAITH |

Again we need to point that these stories do not revolve around what Isaac did or said or believed or didn't believe. We don't learn from his successes and failures like we do most people in scripture. These stories are about how other people react simply because Isaac is there.

So we do see a parallel with Jesus. So much of what we learn about him is simply by seeing how others reacted to him.

But there's much more.

We can actually put the life of Isaac and the mission of Jesus side by side and see other parallels.

Both births were promised long in advance. Abraham had been promised that he would be the father of great nations but it wasn't until he was 100 years old that Isaac. The birth of the Messiah was promised as far back as Genesis chapter 3.

They were both miraculous: Sarah was too old to have children and Mary had not been with a man.

And both births created controversy. Abraham has had a son, Ishmael through his Egyptian wife Hagar. After Isaac begins to grow Sarah makes Abraham kick them out of the house. They eventually reconnect with Egypt where Hagar eventually finds a wife for Ishmael. When Jesus is born, Herod the king hears that people are referring to him as king of the Jews and tries to kill him so his family flees and they live as refugees in Egypt.

This part of their lives I'd love to spend hours exploring with you but that's not our task today so I'll simply point out that Abraham was sent to a hill in the area of Moriah. This is current day Jerusalem. There are a few hills in the area: one was mount Zion but at this time it already had a city on it, the city the David would later conquer to make his capital. There is the actual Mount Moriah where David would by a field to build an altar to God and later his son Solomon would build the temple but now of the other hills just a literal stone's throw from these became known as Golgotha or Calvary where 2000 years later the son of God would be sacrificed.

Abraham the father carried the means of judgment; the knife and fire. Isaac the son carried on his back the wood on which he would be offered.

It was a 3-days journey to this hill meaning that for 3 days Abraham mourned the death of his son but had a faith in a resurrection.

After this "death and resurrection" the father sends a servant to find a bride for his son. He seeks her out. He gives her gifts. He prepares her for the marriage.

Now what about this fourth act in Isaac's life?

Jesus didn't have twins. In one sense he left a fortune and inheritance that people have been fighting about ever since.

However, 'it's not about the kids.' (Everybody Loves Raymond.)

Isaac had faith that in spite of the obvious flaws in his children, God would fulfill his promise.

Isaac had faith that God was working in other people's lives.

Hebrews 11:20 (NLT)
It was by faith that Isaac promised
blessings for the future to his sons,
Jacob and Esau.

CRBC Brian Down

One of the hardest aspects of the faith to which we are called:

Isaac had faith that
God was working
in other people's lives.

This aspect of our faith was the defining characteristic of Jesus' personal life.

We love Jesus. There are so many different things we could talk about but this morning we're going to take a look at Jesus the man.

There are some aspects to his personal life and his personal faith that are so important.

John 5:19 (NLT)

So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.

John 14:10 (NLT)

Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.

Let's begin by remembering how Jesus viewed his own life.

This is the greatest human to walk the earth, he had the greatest potential of human achievement but his one goal was to walk in obedience to his father.

Let's keep that in mind as we look at 2 aspects of his personal life.

Luke 6:12-16 (NLT)

One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles. Here are their names: Simon (whom he named Peter), Andrew (Peter's brother), James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (who was called the zealot), Judas (son of James), Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him).

Remember that little comment about Judas was written long after the fact. No one would have thought that at the time. I don't even think Judas had any idea what would happen but I do believe Jesus knew. Let's jump ahead 3 and a half years.

This is a burden Jesus has been carrying most of his life and now he shares it with his closest friends.

John 13:21-30 (NLT)

Now Jesus was deeply troubled, and he exclaimed, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me!"

The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he could mean. The disciple Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table. Simon Peter motioned to him to ask, "Who's he talking about?" So that disciple leaned over to Jesus and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus responded, "It is the one to whom I give the bread I dip in the bowl." And when he had dipped it, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus told him, "Hurry and do what you're going to do." None of the others at the table knew what Jesus meant. Since Judas was their treasurer, some thought Jesus was telling him to go and pay for the food or to give some money to the poor. So Judas left at once, going out into the night.

As readers there's no question in our minds that he's referring to Judas but the disciples didn't have a clue.

For 3 and a half Jesus treated Judas the same way as all the others with the same love and patience and joy. He even trusted Judas with the responsibility their finances.

The other disciples had never seen Jesus staring daggers at Judas one the dinner table or using Judas as the bad guy in his parables. They'd never heard him whisper 'don't trust that guy'. They had only seen Jesus love Judas.

I'm sure there were times he was tempted to get rid of Judas but Jesus had faith that God was working in Judas' life and nothing would happen outside of God's control. His only job was to love.

Here's another aspect of his personal life that must have been a heaven burden for Jesus to carry.

John 7:1-5 (NLT)

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" For even his brothers didn't believe in him.

Imagine your are suffering from some disease and you can't sleep one night so you're up watching late night TV and were a commercial about a doctor who has a cure your disease. For 3 easy payments of \$99.95 he'll send your this miracle cure and you'll be saved from your suffering. So you've got your credit card in one hand and your phone in the other but you decided to Google this doctor first and you find out that his entire family is dying from this disease and they refuse to take his medicine. I hope you'd quickly put away your credit card and put down your phone.

For 3 years Jesus presented himself as the Messiah to Israel, the one who would solve their problems and bring lasting peace and prosperity to the nation and in fact the whole earth but

during this time it was abundantly clear that his own family did not believe in him. In fact they were trying to convert him, to get him to be a good Jew like them.

I have no doubt that at times Jesus was tempted to force them to believe in him. He could have performed a miracle or read their minds or praised to cure them from sickness if they would accept him. But that was never the father's idea and Jesus obeyed the father in all things so even though it led to pain and loneliness and embarrassment he did not force their submission.

He had faith that God was working in their lives and that God would complete his will in his time.

Even when Jesus looked down from the cross, his siblings were nowhere to be seen. There was his Mother and her friends and there was John the disciple but his siblings were not even there to support their mother through this pain, so deep was their rejection of Jesus.

So how does this turn out?

Acts 1:12-14 (NLT)

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying. Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the zealot), and Judas (son of James). They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

The first glimmer of hope we see is after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Was God's timing right?

He had one brother Jude who went on to be a Church leader and wrote the book of Jude; one of the most mystical and intellectual books of the Bible.

He had another brother, James. He went on to be a Church leader. In fact we could argue he was the first Church leader. When we think of the first elder we often think of Peter and there are some good arguments for that. Or perhaps Paul and there are some good arguments for that. But what we find out is that when Peter and Paul were on opposite sides of an argument they would go up to Jerusalem to seek James' advice.

James also wrote the book of James. He makes a statement early on in that book that I think is kind of a confession, a life lesson he learned through his opposition to his brother Jesus.

James 1:20 (NLT)

Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

So what does produce the righteousness that God desires?

It's one thing to say that Jesus had faith God was working in other people's lives but how did he deal with that? How did he treat them in the meantime?

love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness
self-control

This is how Jesus lived his life and treated people. This is the kind of man Jesus was.

Why does this list sound familiar?

It's what scripture calls the Fruit of the Spirit: The Spirit of Jesus. Jesus lived his life by profound faith on the inside freeing him up to express profound love on the outside.

This was and is the life of Jesus.

God is working in other people's lives.
What does faith look like in our daily walk?
What does faith look like in our church?

There are many of us here today who need to spend time with this Jesus.

Some of us have siblings who are not walking with the Lord. We have children or parents not walking with the Lord.

We have Judases and Judes and Jameses in our lives.

We often think, "If only I'd been a better Christian, a better example. If I'd tried harder they might be saved."

It is possible that something we said or did has hurt someone and they may hold that up as a reason that they don't want anything to do with our God. That's hard but it's not our shame to carry. We lay it at the foot of the cross with all of our other weaknesses and failures and move out in faith the God is working and without God doing the work nothing worthwhile will happen.

There are things Isaac could have done differently as a father that might have had an impact on his sons. He could have lay there on his death bed torturing himself by listing all the things he could have done differently but rather than focussing on his own failures he focussed on God's promises. He lived by faith. He died in faith.

Psalms 127:1-2 (NLT)

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted.
Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.
It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night,
anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.

This is the life we're called to. This is what we see in the life of Jesus.

This idea of the 'life of Jesus' takes on an interesting dimension when the word of God sets out to explain our salvation in Romans ch 5.

Romans 5:10 (NLT)

For since our friendship with God was
restored by the death of his Son
while we were still his enemies,
we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.

This idea of friendship with God is not a casual buddy-buddy kind of thing. It's not like we used to hang out and then he started cheering for a different hockey team so we stopped hanging out and now we're sort of hanging out again 'cause the hockey season is over.

We're talking about a profound separation between a holy creator who designed us to be in fellowship and communion with him but because, through Adam and Eve, we chose to live without God, our very natures became broken and corrupted to the point where eternal fellowship with a holy God, eternal life, became impossible and we were destined for eternal separation from God, eternal death. And at a time when we could do absolutely nothing about it ourselves, Christ stepped in and became the sacrifice for our sins, he became the reconciliation to restore us to God.

It's amazing but it's only the first half of that verse.

There are two clear time frames here.

We were restored by his death - past tense.

We will be saved or we are currently being saved by his life.

Jesus in the tomb 2000 years ago made it possible for us to spend eternity in the presence of God.

Jesus, alive and well, seated at the right hand of God, interceding for us day and night, directing his spirit to work in our lives provides an ongoing, moment by moment, living salvation from fear and hopelessness and shame.

And so with our eyes fixed on Jesus, we work at staying grounded in an absolute faith that God is working in the lives of our siblings, our children, our parents, our Church, our government, our world leaders.

Nothing is outside of his domain.

And because of that we are free to bring his love, is joy, his peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control into the struggles that we face day by day.

Hebrews 12:1-6 (NLT)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin. And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."

Isaac believed God
was working in the lives of his sons.

Jesus believed God was
working in the lives of his brothers and Judas.

WE believe God
is working in the lives of ...

It is definitely one of the hardest aspects of our faith but I truly believe it is the one most responsible for giving us a sense of peace and joy in this world.