



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## Hard Faith

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Hebrews 11:17-22

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*<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." <sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. <sup>20</sup> By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. <sup>21</sup> By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. <sup>22</sup> By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.*

*(Pastor prays)*

When I was in high school, I had several different jobs. I was a busboy at Darryl's restaurant in the old Eastland Mall, I ran a cash register at Hardee's and maintained clay tennis courts at the South Charlotte Tennis Club. But far and away my favorite job was as a lifeguard at the old Idlewild Country Club where Queens Grant High School is now. It was a great job at a great pool. It had a 12-foot deep end with a diving board and even a fenced-in kiddie pool with about four inches of water in it.

Now, you could get wet sitting in the kiddie pool but if you really wanted to enjoy the water, you had to get into the deep end. But the deep end is dangerous and that's just where a lot of us feel like we are, in the deep end. In fact, some of you feel like the water is just about over your heads, and the question is how we are going to make it as wave after wave of pain, depression, anxiety and doubt keep threatening to take us under? Some of those waves are caused by other people, but some of it is you and your own sin or doubt or fear. In this passage, the preacher is urging his people on to trust God in the ocean of their despair. And the way he

does it is by turning their attention to the people who have gone before and had faith that saw them through. In this passage the writer calls their attention to four generations of Israel forebears as an illustration of the forward-looking hope that characterizes faith in the living God. I want you to trust God with your life and your future and your all. I want you to walk away this morning with your faith bolstered knowing that you can trust God no matter what. But that takes faith and the truth is...

### **We Need Faith in the Hard Times**

To strengthen us, the preacher takes us to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph—and holds them up as an encouragement to our faith. What does faith look like? Let's first look at Abraham.

#### **Faith has a proven depth**

Let's read verses 17 through 19 and the account of Genesis 20 and learn some lessons. <sup>17</sup> *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."* <sup>19</sup> *He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

Abraham was tested. Here is one of the most significant events in the entire Old Testament and it is so confusing when we are tested. The word "test" gives us some idea of the disposition of God in the test. Do you ever wonder, what is God doing? Testing. Purifying. Refining. Stretching. God is stripping away crutches and taking away props and removing who you have relied on. And it can be so difficult. There are several ways in the passage that the author underlines the gravity of this test. The word "offered" appears twice in verse 17 calling to mind the finality and the scope of this test. Some of you have been tested like that. The finality of death.

To intensify it even more, at the end of verse 17 he uses the phrase "only son" – "*monogenes*." That is the same word that is used of Jesus when we are told God gave us His only son. In Genesis 22:2 it says, <sup>2</sup> *Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—* you can feel the sheer emotional cost of the test, the agony and grief and despair.

In addition, we are told of Isaac's indispensability. God had promised that Abraham would have offspring that were as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sand on the seashore.

Isaac was the sum total hope of the future. This is a disorienting test. This flies in the face of everything that Abraham believed about God and the future and what blessings really are. It's so confusing because Abraham knew reality and the reality was that the promised couldn't be fulfilled if Abraham sacrificed Isaac. The Lord's command did not make any sense. Nevertheless, Abraham trusted God by carrying out His commands! How did he do it? Verse 19 gives us some insight into Abraham's thinking. <sup>19</sup> *He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

Paul Tripp helps us think through verse 19. He says there are four legs of faith here. The first is the command of God. If God gives the command in His word, then He will do something good. This is what Jesus said in Matthew 16:24. <sup>24</sup> *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

The second leg is the promise of God. God had made a firm covenantal promise to Abraham. God will be true. Third is the power of God. Verse 19 says he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead. Abraham had seen what God had done with Sarah's womb. Her womb was dead and God brought life. Let's not forget the power of God to save and change and heal and carry you through.

So there is God's command, God's promises and God's power. Finally there is God's faithfulness. Abraham had to wait and wait and wait, trusting that God is faithful. There is something else here that has New Testament life in it. <sup>19</sup> *He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

Figuratively speaking is *Parabolé*. It means "foreshadowing" of another father. God the Father is giving His only son Jesus and His resurrection from the dead to be our great High Priest. That is the Gospel. The Gospel gives us faith for hard times. And faith has a proven depth.

### **Faith has a learned trust**

Now in Verse 20 that preacher turns his attention to Isaac. Poor Isaac. He is the least spectacular and the most ordinary of the four patriarchs listed. Abraham, Jacob and Joseph get about 12 chapters in Genesis apiece but Isaac gets two. He lived the longest and did the least.

This passage takes us back to the time Jacob tricked his father into thinking he was Esau and Isaac gave him the better blessing. Isaac found out he had been tricked and left the good blessing for the trickster Jacob and the lesser blessing for Esau. Because according to Hebrews 11:20, he was trusting God for the future. In that scene in Genesis 22 it's just Isaac giving blessings to the deceiver Jacob and the meathead Esau. But if you go back to that passage it's filled with Jacob's deception of his father Isaac. This story is found in the Bible to impress on us a few things.

The infinite wisdom of God. Esau was the older and Jacob was the younger and the natural thing for Isaac to do would be to impart the blessing on the first born. But God knew that promise had to come through Jacob, so He allowed the deceit to go on. God is so infinitely wise He can take the worst deceit and make it into the greatest blessing.

The overruling sovereignty of God. God will overrule Jacob's deceit and bring forth the promised generation that led to Jesus Christ. God overrules all that you are facing and the wrongs that have been done. It helps now and then to say to yourself, "this is my father's world." This is our faith. This is learning to trust God when people have wronged you, cheated the system and done well when you haven't. And being able to look gladly toward the future, knowing that God is there and that's enough. Faith has a proven depth. Faith has a learned trust.

### **Faith is the product of obvious grace**

Verse 21 brings us to Jacob. Sometimes I wonder how does Jacob get a pass? I mean why is he included in the patriarchs? Why throughout the Bible does God allow Himself to be called the God of Jacob? Why does He reveal Himself as the God of Jacob? Go read the story of Jacob; it is the lowest form of disrespect. He dishonors and deceives his father, He conspires with and uses his mother, he constantly mistreats and abuses his brother. He lives a long life and this verse 21 takes us back to the story in Genesis 48 when decrepit, old Jacob is blind and sick and gives a blessing to his grandsons; he crosses his hands and gives the younger the best blessing. Why is Jacob's life mentioned here? There could be a lot of reasons. There's not much to emulate in Jacob's life. He's sort of up and down spiritually and is unremarkable for his ethics and holiness and righteousness. I think the story is here at least in part to remind us of grace.

Do you know the word “grace”? I mean if you really understood it, I think you would weep through every worship service and vow never to complain about anything ever again. This would solve most of our jealousies and judgment. This is Christianity, this is sovereign grace.

God in His goodness, let’s say the Gospel like this: God in his goodness created us in His image. You have dignity and deserve respect because you have been created in the image of God. That image of God in you has been disfigured by sin. Sin is a capital crime against a sovereign God who is our ruler. That crime must be punished, and the punishment for that crime is death. But God is not just a judge. He is also good and kind and merciful. And God in His love gives us Jesus. Jesus, the God-man. Jesus lives perfectly. That’s important because He lived like we can’t. And then, here’s what happens at the cross – God unleashes all of His wrath and anger and punishment on Jesus. And this is why it’s so terrible and only Jesus could take it – there at the cross, everything you and I deserve is poured out on Jesus. He takes our sin, and we get His righteousness. And as a stamp of victory, three days later, God raised Him from the dead. He is ascended into Heaven where He reigns as Lord. And the Gospel says, if you will believe, repent of your sin, turn to Jesus, He will save you. It’s grace.

God does not bless us because we deserve it. God blesses us to show the goodness of His glory and the depth of His mercy and the radical nature of His love. And if God will give grace to Jacob, He will give grace through the cross to you. And that grace from God produces faith in us! Faith is the product of obvious grace. It has proven depth and learned trust.

### **Faith has a joyful endurance**

The writer ends with a little flourish on the patriarchs by calling our attention to the end of Joseph's life. But to appreciate the end, you need to know a little about Joseph and all he went through. Joseph was loved by his father and envied by his brothers. He was kidnapped, assaulted and sold into slavery. When he was deported to Egypt, he was seduced and lied about by Potiphar’s wife and then thrown into prison where he was forgotten. He was finally remembered and brought into Pharaoh’s service and ended up being a leader in Egypt and a protector of his brothers and Jacob.

But the family was in Egypt. Joseph knew what God had promised about the land beyond the desert and this verse takes us back to his dying wish. In Genesis 50:24-25 it says, <sup>24</sup>*And Joseph*

said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." <sup>25</sup> Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." And that is what happened in Exodus 13 and Joshua 24. In all that Joseph went through, all he endured, he trusted that God would keep His promise. I want you to trust God. We are in hard times. We need faith for hard times. Faith has a proven depth. Faith has a learned trust. Faith has an obvious grace. Faith has joyful endurance. And all that faith is yours in Christ Jesus. Is your faith deep? Do you trust? Have you thought much about grace? Are you joyfully enduring?

*(Pastor prays)*