

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 20 March 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

An Inventory of Faith

Hebrews 11:20-22

During my college years, as I was studying God's Word, and preparing for the ministry, I took some Accounting classes, in order to prepare for the "bookkeeping" facet of the ministry. Although I did well in those classes, they certainly weren't my favourite. I remember the many times when I sat on the floor of my dorm room, with all my ledger sheets spread out in front of me. As I "took inventory" of hypothetical companies, and crunched the numbers, they didn't always add up the way that I thought they would. There were times when, after adding, and re-adding, I thought for sure that there was a flaw in the textbook. "Surely there's a typo somewhere," I figured. "I *know* I've found an error this time." However, after combing through the inventory one more time, I found that everything added up, after all. Over the years in the ministry, as I've gone through the books of Redemption Baptist Church, there have been times when I thought that there was an error in the bank statement. My ledger and the bank statement were only a couple Euros and a few odd cents off from each other; and the problem certainly wasn't on *my* end (so I thought)! But then, I found the problem; and, once again, it turned out to be on *my* end. I've finally come to the point where I "account" that the bank statement is right; and I make adjustments accordingly.

In the same way, Abraham "took inventory" of God's "account book"; and what he saw in God's account was absolute perfection. When God commanded Abraham to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, Abraham "accounted" that "**God was able to raise up**" his son Isaac, "**even from the dead.**" He concluded that the all-powerful, all-faithful God who had commanded him to sacrifice his son *must also* be able to raise him from the dead. He knew that the only way that God could keep his promise of making of him a great nation was to bring Isaac back to life. Of course, little did Abraham know that God had *another* remedy to the crisis: God would stop Abraham just in the nick of time, and would provide a ram to offer on the altar, instead of Isaac.

Absolute perfection is what you'll find in *God's* account book; and that is good news for us! Not only does it mean that God will *always* keep His promises: it also means that God is able to take *His* perfect righteousness, and credit it to our own bankrupt accounts! This is called "imputed" righteousness. Because Christ paid our sin debt on the cross, God the Father is able to "impute" the righteousness of His Son to our account. When we who are saved stand before God, the books will show that we have Christ's righteousness. It is on this basis that we are saved!

However, not only does God give us *imputed* righteousness; He also gives us *actual* righteousness.

As we submit ourselves to God, He imparts His own holy character to us; and **faith** is one of the qualities that He imparts. Whenever you see faith being exercised in a Christian's life, that faith is actually *Christ's* faith, which Christ Himself is carrying out in that believer's life.

This morning, I would like to take inventory of the faith of three men of God: Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. These men did not *always* walk by faith; but whenever they did exercise faith, it was the "real deal." The

faith that manifested in their lives was the faith that God Himself imparted to them. As we examine their faith, I would like to point out three particular *qualities* of their faith. The title of this message is ***An Inventory of Faith.***

Read Hebrews 11:20-22.

I. Faith does not seek personal desire.

In **verse 20**, Paul asks us to consider the faith of **Isaac**. Particularly, he asks us to consider the faith that Isaac demonstrated when he blessed his sons Esau and Jacob concerning things to come.

Now, of all the acts of faith that Paul could have mentioned, you'd think that Isaac's action on Mount Moriah would have been it! It took just as much faith for Isaac to get up on the altar as it took for Abraham to take up the knife to slay his own son. There was nothing forced or involuntary about Isaac's actions on that day. Isaac knew that *he* was the designated sacrifice; and being a full-grown man (and much younger than his father), he could have "cut and run." Yet, he voluntarily submitted to God's will. Why didn't Paul expound some more upon *that* stupendous act of faith?

Well, as always, God's thoughts are not our thoughts. There is something about the faith that Isaac exercised on the day when he blessed his son Jacob that God wants us to consider. Let's take a look at this account, and see what we can learn about the quality of Isaac's faith.

Read Genesis 25:24-34 and 27:1-40.

In light of what we've just read, some of you may be wondering: Why is God holding up Isaac's faith, in *this* instance, as a model for us? It appears that Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob not because he was acting in faith, but only because he was *tricked!* Isaac *wanted* to give the blessing to his favourite son, *Esau*; but because Jacob told a big lie (and even brought God's name into it), he managed to convince his father that *he* was Esau, so that *he* would be given the blessing. Was this really faith on Isaac's part? To answer that question, let's examine an earlier incident in Isaac's life, and see if we can get the whole picture.

Read Genesis 25:21-23.

When Rebekah went to the Lord to inquire about the unusual struggle that was going on in her womb, God spoke to her, and gave her a revelation of the future. He said that the descendants of the two boys who were in her womb would struggle and war with each other, and that the older son would serve the younger son. In other words, God was revealing that **Jacob, the younger son, would be the one to receive the birthright.** *Jacob's* descendants would inherit the land of Canaan, because they were the chosen people. *Jacob's* line would be the line through whom the Messiah would come. God, in His omniscience, knew that the younger son, Jacob, would be spiritually qualified to be the father of His chosen nation, and that Esau, the older, would not.

Now, here is the big question: Did *Isaac* know about this? Did Rebekah *tell* her husband about this revelation that the Lord had given her? The Bible doesn't say that she did; but I think it safe to assume that she wouldn't have withheld such an important revelation from her husband. Surely she would have shared it with him!

Now, if Rebekah *did* share this information with Isaac, and if Isaac *did* know that Jacob was the chosen one, then why was he intent upon giving *Esau* the blessing? Wouldn't that mean that Isaac was trying to oppose God's will? Even if Rebekah *didn't* tell Isaac what she knew, Isaac still must have realized that of his two sons, Jacob was the one who cared about the things of God. Esau had already sold his birthright (the right to be the spiritual leader of the family) to his brother Jacob, in exchange for a bowl of soup! Why? Because he was hungry, and couldn't wait to eat! Esau couldn't care less about leading the family in spiritual things: it was only carnal things, and the *material* portion of the inheritance, that he was concerned about. The Bible also tells us, in **Hebrews 12**, that Esau was a fornicator. He was an immoral, profane man. Esau had already married two idol-worshipping Canaanite wives, in opposition to his parents' wishes; and even Isaac was deeply grieved by this. Yet, despite the fact that Esau did not know or love God, Isaac was still determined to give the blessing to Esau. Why? Well, we saw the answer to that question back in **Genesis 25:28**. Isaac loved Esau because he loved the *venison* that Esau brought back from the field. That's sad, isn't it? Isaac was making the momentous decision of who would inherit Canaan upon the basis of his stomach!

Now, Isaac and Rebekah shouldn't have had "favourite" sons, in the first place! They should have loved their sons equally. However, as far as the blessing was concerned, only one son could have it; and Isaac should have realised that God didn't always give the birthright / blessing to the firstborn. Seth wasn't the firstborn of Adam; yet, he had the birthright. Shem wasn't the firstborn of Noah; yet, he had the birthright. Abraham wasn't the firstborn of Terah; yet, he had the birthright. God gave birthrights and blessings according to *spiritual fitness*; and Esau was in no position to lead the family spiritually. Isaac was making the decision of which son would inherit Canaan according to his fleshly appetite. He literally was following his stomach! No wonder Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage. He was just following his dad's example!

How could Isaac--the man who had had such great faith on Mount Moriah--have come to such a backslidden state? How could he knowingly oppose God's will? Perhaps he had convinced himself that his wife's vision 77 years earlier wasn't really from God, but was only her imagination. It's hard to know exactly what was going through Isaac's mind. One thing is for sure, though: he was *not* walking by faith when he instructed Esau to bring him some venison, so that he could eat it, and bless him.

Thus, we are brought back to the question: "Was Isaac really exercising faith when he blessed his sons?" Yes, he was. Let's look again at **Genesis 27**, and see if we can find indications of Isaac's faith. **(Read Genesis 27:34-40 again.)** The evidence of Isaac's faith in this account is twofold. First of all, Isaac *did* believe, with all his heart, that God had promised to give the land of Canaan to his seed. He had never doubted that. All his life, he had clung to that promise. His faith had failed in the matter of *which* son would inherit Canaan; but he believed God's covenant promise, nonetheless.

Secondly, after Isaac realised that he had been tricked, *he did not attempt to do it over again*. He didn't try to make his blessing on Jacob "null and void." He fully believed that God had given him the patriarchal authority to bestow this blessing, and that the words that had come out of his mouth were inspired by God. He fully believed that Jacob, even though he had tricked him, was now the one who would receive the blessing of the land of Canaan! He recognised that God, in His sovereignty, had allowed this awful deception to take place, and

that it was, indeed, God's will for Jacob to have the blessing! Esau *was* his favourite son—the one whom he had *personally* hoped would have the blessing; yet, no matter how much Esau wept, Isaac would not reverse the blessing. Instead, he confirmed it even more, as he allowed the Holy Spirit to speak through him again. As he blessed Esau, he revealed that Esau's dwelling would be “from the fatness of the land.” (The Hebrew literally says m 'shemaney-- “**from** the fatness of.”) In other words, he and his descendants would live *away from*, or *outside of*, the land of Canaan. Also, Isaac prophesied that Esau would *serve his brother Jacob*.

When you take inventory of the books, and you look under “faith,” this is one of the “entries” that you will see. **True faith does not seek one's own personal desire.** True faith says, “Lord, not my will, but thine be done.” True faith does not bellyache about how God allowed things to turn out, because “it wasn't what *I* wanted.” Rather, faith quietly resigns to God's will, and seeks God to show me what to do next.

Isaac did not turn back. He followed through with God's will. A few days later, he sent Jacob off to his relatives in Syria, so that he could find a wife there that was a worshipper of Jehovah; and as he sent him off, he bestowed the covenant blessing upon him once again. He said, “**God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham..**”

Christian, this kind of faith *is* available to you. God has blessed you “**with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.**” Your faith may be weak, like Isaac's; but if you will but surrender to Him, He will give you true faith--the kind that does not seek personal desire. It is right there in the treasury of God's grace! You are not a slave to selfish desires, as you were before you were saved. You have been made *free* to do God's will. By the way, “freedom” isn't “doing what *I* want to do.” That's actually *slavery*! “Freedom” is the ability to do *God's* will—the ability to please *Him*.

Read Romans 6:16-19.

Are you living this kind of faith, Christian? Or are you following your own desires?

II. Faith does not give in to external pressure (v. 21).

Of the three patriarchs, Jacob is the one who seemed to have the most spiritual failures in his life. We don't know exactly when Jacob was saved, because in the first 77 years of his life, the evidence of saving faith was weak, at best. Some people believe that Jacob wasn't truly saved until the night when the Lord spoke to him at Bethel, when he was on his way to Padan-aram. Personally, I believe that he was saved before that point. Nonetheless, Jacob had a lot of sin issues to deal with in his life (especially deceit); and he had decades of hard lessons to learn. However, as he matured in the LORD, his faith became stronger, and more apparent; and by the end of his life, he made this brilliant demonstration of faith. (**Read Hebrews 11:21 again.**)

Let's go back to the Old Testament once again, and take inventory of Jacob's faith.

Read Genesis 48:1-6.

When Jacob gave this prophecy, he was acting in faith. He was no longer living the life of a double-minded, vacillating believer, as he had done earlier in his life. This was a *huge* decision, which would profoundly affect the future of the nation of Israel: yet, Jacob acted in the full assurance that God was directing him to say these words. He confidently asserted, under inspiration of God, that Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, would be *two* separate tribes, instead of the one tribe of Joseph. He didn't know how it was going to work out (especially since they were now living in Egypt, instead of Canaan); but he trusted that God was making this pronouncement.

However, that's not all. Let's read further in the chapter, and see what Jacob did next.

Read Genesis 48:13-21.

Do you see the pressure that Jacob was under? For one thing, all 12 of Jacob's sons were present for this occasion. It surely must have occurred to Jacob that his 10 oldest sons might resent Manasseh's and Ephraim's being given tribe status. After all, Manasseh and Ephraim weren't Jacob's sons; they were his *grandsons*. Jacob was, essentially, *adopting* his grandsons, and giving them the status of *sons*, and making their descendants into two distinct tribes. This means that Joseph would now have *two* tribes, through his two sons!

Furthermore, Jacob was bypassing his oldest son, Reuben, and was giving the "blessing"--the largest portion of the inheritance of the land of Canaan--to Joseph's son, Ephraim. Would Jacob's 10 oldest sons be jealous of Manasseh and Ephraim, just as they had been jealous of Joseph years earlier?

The good news is that the brothers didn't seem to have any problem with this blessing. God had changed their hearts, and had taken away their old jealousy. However, there *was* one person in the room who *wasn't* happy. Surprisingly, that person was Joseph!

Now, Joseph was a godly man, with godly wisdom. Thus far, Joseph had been given at least two dreams from God; and he had interpreted at least four dreams for others. Yet, on this occasion, Joseph was wrong! He thought his father was mistaken. He thought that his *older* son, Manasseh, should be given the blessing. I'm sure that Joseph spoke respectfully to his father, even as he opposed him; nevertheless, Jacob must have been feeling some pressure. After all, Joseph wasn't merely his son: he was the ruler of Egypt! Under God's guiding hand, Joseph had saved whole nations from starvation. Joseph had saved his own father, brothers, and their families, from starvation. At Joseph's gracious invitation, he and his family had been given the best land in Egypt; and Jacob himself had *bowed down* to Joseph, along with the whole family! Was Jacob really going to contradict the great Joseph, in front of the whole family?

Do you see why Jacob might have felt pressured to take back what he had said, and to bless Manasseh instead? After all, no one would have thought anything of it. They would have assumed that Jacob had made a simple error, since he was blind. Yet, Jacob would not be moved. He knew that he was not mistaken. He wasn't being bull-headed, or stubborn. He was simply saying the words that *God* had directed him to say.

In this, we see another quality of true faith. **True faith does not give in to external pressure.** Tragically, external pressure often comes from saved people, who mean well, but who fail to recognize God's will in other's lives. How many Christian parents or relatives, for example, have discouraged their sons and daughters from serving God as a pastor, pastor's wife, or

missionary, even though God had clearly spoken to their children's hearts! "Don't be a pastor, son! Your income will be unstable; and there are all kinds of problems and hard-hearted people to deal with in the ministry. Don't go to the mission field (especially not *that* country)! Disease is rampant, the health care is poor, and there are people there who hate the Gospel, and who might even kill you! Stay here! You can always teach a Sunday School class right here in the church."

These are the kinds of ungodly words that can come out of the mouths of well-meaning Christians! Yet, true faith (not fleshly bullheadedness, but faith) will not cave to external pressure. Why? Because it comes from the one who "***set his face like a flint.***"

Read Isaiah 50:4-7.

This passage is a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion. The Lord Jesus was beaten, spat upon, and His beard ripped out; yet, despite all this, He was resigned to follow His Father's will. He was *not* ashamed. He "***set His face like a flint.***" And, remember--whose righteousness has been put on your account, Christian? **Christ's righteousness!** This means that God can set *your* face like a flint, too. Flint-like faith in the face of opposition is yours for the taking, Christian--if you will let Christ bestow it to you!

Whether the pressure be as mild as a discouraging word from a well-meaning brother who doesn't recognise God's will for you, or whether it be as malignant as imprisonment or death for the name of Christ, you *can* have the faith to stand strong, and not to be moved from God's will. Like King David, you, too, can confidently say, "***Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.***"

When Jacob blessed Manasseh and Ephraim, he was going against the societal norm; and you may be sure that when *you* live by faith, you will be going "counter-culture," as well (sometimes, even against *Christian* culture). People will say things like this:

- "You're going to church every time the doors are open? You don't need to do that! No one will miss your presence. You can worship God at home."
- "You're dressing like *that* now? And you're listening to *that* boring music? Do you want people to think that you're better than they are?"
- "You're going to get baptized? You don't need to do that. People know you're a Christian. Besides, you have plenty of time to think about it."
- "You've decided not to have a telly? But look at all the *other* Christians who have televisions! Do you think that you're right, and they're wrong?"
- "You mean you are going to stop going to the cinema and watching Hollywood movies? You want to be culturally relevant, don't you?"
- "You mean you're actually going to tithe? And you're going to give *that much* to missions? You don't have to do that. Jesus didn't talk about money, did He?"
- "You really want to go to the mission field? How will you live?"
- "You're going to spend that much of your week participating in door-knocking and tract distribution? You don't want people to think you're a Jehovah's Witness, do you? Besides, there are other ways to spread the Gospel."
- "You want to teach a Sunday School class? You don't know how to speak! Besides, you've never gone to Bible college."

Brethren, if God is knocking on your heart's door, and is calling you to take a step of faith in your life, don't let anyone pressure you into stopping short of it! Some of these things that I've just mentioned are things that *every* Christian should be doing; and some are "custom-made" acts of faith that God wants to do in *your* life, in particular. There may be something that you, in your heart, know that God wants you to do; and you are struggling with what others (even other Christians) might think about it. If so, don't let anyone stop you! Faith does not cave in to external pressure!

III. Faith *seems* to go against reality.

The last inventory of faith that we will be taking this morning is from the life of Joseph. (Read Hebrews 11:22.) Once again, let's go back to the Old Testament, and look at this account in detail.

Read Genesis 50:22-26.

What was the great act of faith, here? So Joseph wanted to be buried in Canaan, where he had grown up. A lot of people have the sentimental desire to be buried in their "homeland." Is this really such a big deal?

Actually, it *is* a big deal. *God* saw this as a big enough deal to include it in the "Hall of Faith." Of all the great acts of faith in Joseph's life, God made mention of this one, in particular. Why? **Because this act of faith was rooted in the covenant promise that God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.** Joseph firmly believed God's promise that one day, Israel would take possession of Canaan; and he believed that one day, in that land, from Israel's stock, the Messiah—the Saviour of the world—would be born. He believed this with all his heart; and therefore, he wanted to be "part of" the Exodus of his people from Egypt. He firmly believed that the Exodus *would* happen!

Now, Joseph's faith in God's promise must have *seemed* to go against reality. Remember, how old was Joseph when he died? One hundred ten. And how old was he when his father and brothers moved down into Egypt? Thirty-nine. And how many kindred of Jacob came down into Egypt? Seventy-five (including his sons' wives, and grandsons). How many people might have sprung from a family of 70 + people over the next seventy-one years, until Joseph's death? Easily 10,000—and possibly many more!

Do you think that the children of Israel really just a "big family" by the time of Joseph's death? No. By this point, they were a small nation; and very few of them, by this point, had ever lived in Canaan. Egypt was the only home that they knew. They had not really assimilated into Egyptian society very much; but this was mainly because of the influence of the patriarchs, who were still living.

However, the patriarchs were nearly all dead now. Did Joseph really think that the children of Israel would *stay* separate from the Egyptians, and not melt into their society? I mean, come now! That just doesn't happen! Societies that move into other people's lands eventually intermarry with the people—unless they utterly annihilate them (which, of course, the children of Israel had no ability or desire to do to the Egyptians). Besides, why would they *want* to leave? How would thousands, even millions of people, who had never seen Canaan, retain the belief of their ancestor Abraham that Canaan was to be their land (especially when Abraham himself never inherited any portion of that land)? What would possess the children of Israel to uproot themselves from a fertile land, where they were well-treated and prosperous, and to go and make war with the Canaanites?

Joseph's faith didn't seem to line up with reality. Reality said that they were there in Egypt to *stay*. The possession of Canaan by the children of Israel must have seemed like an idle dream. Yet, Joseph believed God's Word; and he commanded that when Israel eventually left Egypt, his body should be taken out with them, and buried in Canaan. One hundred forty-four years after Joseph's death, the children of Israel remembered that request, and took Joseph's body with them. Only God could make this happen!

So, what is the point? The point is that **true faith—the faith that Christ imparts to His people—always seems to go against reality.** Christian, when you, by faith, go to the treasury of God's grace, and avail of the faith that Christ has deposited there--when you decide to *stop* living by sight, and to start living by the "***faith of Christ***"--you may be sure that others will think you to be "out of touch with reality." People will say that you are using God as a "crutch," because you "don't know how to deal with reality."

Folks, nothing could be more untrue! It is those who do *not* live by faith in God who are not in touch with reality. It is *they* who are living in a dream-world of their own making. It is *they* who are building their lives upon sinking sand. Those who build their lives upon Christ's words are not "leaning on a crutch"; they are *standing upon* the "***stone of Israel***," whom Jacob spoke of before he died. Jesus is the Shepherd, and the Stone of Israel. He is the God in whom we move, and breath, and have our being. To live your life independently of His direction is to be detached from reality.

If you are saved, you are in Christ, and you are eternally secure; but God wants you to live every moment of your life by faith. Are you doing that? Are you trusting in the things that are seen—or in the things that are *not* seen? Let's look at one more Scripture.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

Conclusion: Have you looked at Christ's "account book," Christian? Have you *really* looked at it? Just as importantly, do you fully realise that the righteousness in Christ's account book has been deposited in *your* account book? God has already given you *imputed* righteousness; and *actual* righteousness is available to you, as well. It's there in the "treasury." All you have to do is ask Him to give you the faith that you need: and He will do it. The faith that He bestows **does not seek personal desire; it does not give in to external pressure;** and, though it **seems to go against reality**, it is *completely* grounded in reality. Are you living your life by this kind of faith? If not, I exhort you to examine the "books," take "account" of your inheritance, and start living by faith!

Perhaps you are not truly saved; and you have never lived by faith, because Christ's faith has never been put in your account. If so, you need Christ's righteousness! Won't you believe on Him today?