

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrews 11: 17-22

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Hebrews chapter 11, verses 17 to 22.

The Hebrew author lists the deeds of the great men of faith from the Old Testament, aiming to help readers understand what faith is, particularly its validation, as he defines faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". Yesterday, we read the story of Abraham, the father of faith. Abraham arrived at the promised land of Canaan God had promised, yet he dwelt in tents because he recognized God's greater promise—a better homeland in heaven. Thus, he was willing to live as a sojourner and pilgrim on earth. He completed his life's journey on earth without receiving what was promised, and he died in faith. In faith, he saw from afar and joyfully welcomed that city in heaven.

As we mentioned earlier, God's promises become our hope. Our faith helps us realize this hope. God's promises have two aspects: earthly and heavenly. Earthly promises are material and temporary; heavenly promises are spiritual and eternal. On his journey of following God, Abraham first received the earthly promises, but he was not satisfied with them. He offered what he had received to God, and each offering was an exchange of the earthly for the heavenly. This dedication deepened his understanding of God's promises, making it increasingly lofty and heavenly; his hope shifted from earthly inheritance to a better homeland in heaven.

Abraham is our father of faith, and the path he walked is one we must also tread, for one day we will be with him in that city built by God. Abraham built altars and offered sacrifices many times in his life, but the most glorious was the offering of Isaac, the pinnacle of his faith. The author then uses verses 17-19 to describe this event, followed by the story of Isaac's faith.

Verse 17: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,"

When Abraham was tested by faith, true faith withstands the test. Abraham's faith endured countless trials. God, being omniscient, certainly knew the measure of Abraham's faith, so the testing of faith was not for God's sake but for Abraham's. Only through testing can a person's true condition of faith be revealed.

Abraham had moments of failure while following the Lord. Twice he called his wife Sarah his sister, putting her in dangerous situations, and both times God intervened to rescue her. Faith is continually tested in this way, ultimately becoming more precious than gold refined by fire. The greatest test of Abraham's faith was offering up Isaac. This occurred when he was very mature and seasoned; God would not have asked him to offer Isaac when he first began following Him.

Likewise, today God tests our faith according to the measure of our lives. Abraham's offering of Isaac is recorded in Genesis 22:1-19. Isaac was the offspring God promised Abraham, born to Sarah after her childbearing years had ceased, through God "making something out of nothing." He was the son Abraham joyfully received as God's promise, his only son, yet God asked Abraham to offer him up.

If we read the account in Genesis 22, we see how mature and resolute Abraham was at this time. In Genesis 22:2-3, "Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' So, Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."

In this passage, God specifically emphasized "your son, your only son, Isaac whom you love." Three times, He reminded Abraham to offer his most beloved to Him. Abraham did not negotiate or even tell Sarah; early the next morning, he set out with Isaac toward Mount Moriah. Isaac had likely often accompanied Abraham to offer sacrifices and knew the process. As the father and son climbed the mountain, Isaac carried the wood on his back, while Abraham held the fire and the knife. Isaac,

puzzled, asked, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" This question pierced Abraham's heart like a knife, and he could only reply, "God will provide for Himself."

When they reached the place God had indicated, Abraham built the altar, arranged the wood, bound Isaac, and placed him on the wood. It was not until Abraham raised the knife to slay his son that God's angel called from heaven to stop him, providing a ram to take Isaac's place. In the offering of Isaac, Abraham's faith passed God's test.

Verse 18: "of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,'"

Before Isaac's birth, Abraham, acting in the flesh, had Ishmael with the maidservant Hagar, but this was not the offspring God intended. God told Abraham to send Ishmael away, for he could not inherit Abraham's estate. In Genesis 25:1-2, we see that after Sarah's death, Abraham took another wife and had six more sons. During his lifetime, he sent these sons away from Isaac to the east. Only those born through Isaac would be called Abraham's descendants. Yet God asked Abraham to offer up this Isaac, who bore His promise and was deeply loved by Abraham.

Offering Isaac not only touched Abraham's deepest pain, but from God's side, if Isaac were gone, where would the promised offspring come from? Isaac was the only son God recognized as Abraham's, and through him, God had promised descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. How could God's promise be fulfilled? These were unanswerable questions at the time. So why did God ask Abraham to offer Isaac? In fact, God was laying a foreshadowing here. The pain of Abraham, as a father offering his only beloved son, mirrors the pain of God the Father sacrificing His only beloved Son to accomplish redemption. Abraham saw from afar that God's Son would be given, and so he willingly offered Isaac without reservation.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we face difficulties in life, feel heartbroken, or even blame God for not intervening, we may think God is too harsh or demands too

much of us. But let us not forget that God gave His only begotten Son for us. He knows our feelings, yet He also knows these trials are for our benefit.

Verse 19: "concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."

From the account in Genesis, it's hard to imagine that, facing such a painful decision, Abraham maintained extraordinary calm and fully obeyed God's command. He neither compromised nor hesitated. How did Abraham manage this? Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author of Hebrews reveals Abraham's inner story: he concluded that God was able to raise people from the dead. The Greek word for "concluding" is *logizomai*, rooted in logic, meaning a perception derived from careful logical reasoning. This is a word Paul frequently used, appearing 27 times in his epistles. Paul, a man of rich thought, rigor, and logic, favored this term.

It turns out that Abraham could carry out God's command so calmly because he had carefully reasoned it out and arrived at the most logical conclusion: God must be able to raise Isaac from the dead. God's promise would surely be fulfilled, and His promises to Abraham—whether descendants or inheritance—depended on Isaac. If God asked Abraham to offer Isaac, the only possibility was that God could resurrect him.

Though Abraham didn't know how God would raise Isaac, that was God's concern, not his. Abraham held fast to this conviction, calmly obeying God's command to offer Isaac. His faith was not blind but the result of logical deduction. Since God required Isaac's offering and promised that Abraham's seed would come through Isaac, with descendants multiplying greatly, the only path was for God to raise Isaac from the dead.

Though God stopped Abraham at the last moment, for Abraham, it was as if he received his son back from the dead. Thus, Isaac became a type of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Isaac's birth allowed Abraham to experience God's power to create

something from nothing; offering Isaac allowed him to experience God's power to raise the dead. Isaac became both the son God promised and the son God granted.

Dear brothers and sisters, on our journey of following God, we too must experience these two aspects of God's power. Perhaps you are in a place of lack right now, and God wants you to experience His ability to create from nothing. Or perhaps you are facing death or a hopeless situation, and God wants you to experience resurrection from the dead. For the path Abraham walked, we must walk too.

Verse 20: "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."

In the offering of Isaac, we focus on Abraham, but Isaac's obedience was beyond human imagination. At that time, Isaac was at least sixteen or seventeen, a young man, perhaps taller and stronger than Abraham. If he had wanted to escape, Abraham could not have caught him. Yet he willingly let himself be bound and placed on the altar. Obedience in faith and receiving in faith became the hallmark of Isaac's life.

His life, though not as bold as Abraham's, was marked by tolerance, generosity, and yielding, making it smooth and steady. He dug several wells in his lifetime, and in the water-scarce land of Canaan, he found living water each time. Though the author of Hebrews does not mention these victories, he highlights that Isaac, by faith, blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

This event is recorded in Genesis 27, in Isaac's old age, when he intended to pass on the blessing God gave Abraham to his sons. Isaac loved his eldest son, Esau, forgetting that when the twin brothers were born, God had told his wife Rebekah that the older would serve the younger. Rebekah kept this word in her heart and favored Jacob, the younger son. When she learned Isaac was about to bless Esau, she devised a plan for Jacob to disguise himself as Esau and deceive Isaac into giving him the blessing.

This process was intricate and fascinating, but we cannot delve into it here. Please review Genesis 27 in your daily reading, dear saints. For now, we follow the author's train of thought. The event mentioned was something Isaac did in confusion in his old age. Why does the author highlight this? The answer lies in Genesis 27:33. After Isaac blessed Jacob, Esau prepared wild game and brought it to Isaac, asking for a blessing. Only then did Isaac realize he had been deceived by Rebekah and Jacob.

Normally, one might expect anger or outrage, but Genesis 27:33 says, "Then Isaac trembled exceedingly" (NKJV). He was afraid. He likely recalled what God had said to Rebekah when the brothers were born. From a human perspective, Isaac liked Esau's straightforwardness and disliked Jacob's cunning, but God sees the future and chose Jacob. Isaac trembled because he nearly interfered with God's plan due to his personal preference. Thankfully, his biased wife used deception to secure the blessing for Jacob. This deceit was not pleasing to God, and Rebekah and Jacob paid a heavy price for it, but it prevented Isaac from making a greater mistake, causing him to tremble in fear. From this negative incident, we see Isaac's faith—he set aside his natural preferences and, in accordance with God's will, passed on God's blessing.

Verse 21: "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff."

Jacob is the most detailed figure in Genesis, with his birth recorded in Genesis 25 and his death in Genesis 50, spanning half the book. His life was highly romantic. Naturally cunning and grasping, his parents named him Jacob, meaning "supplanter" or "grasper." He was not a likable person, but he had one trait: a desire to seize the best. Born second by mere minutes, he refused to accept it and schemed to take the birthright. Such a flawed man was molded in God's hands.

His life was full of hardship. In youth, he grasped; in old age, he was stripped until he had nothing left but God. In this process, his name was changed to Israel. He stopped grasping and began blessing others. Few in Scripture reached Jacob's

spiritual height in old age—he was so spiritual, so transparent. Jacob’s life is the finest example of the Holy Spirit’s work in a person.

From Jacob’s long life, the author of Hebrews highlights only his blessing of Joseph’s two sons before his death, recorded in Genesis 48:8-22. Joseph, a ruler in Egypt, had two sons born there. When famine struck, Jacob’s family of 70 came to Egypt to join Joseph, his eleventh son. Jacob adopted Joseph’s two sons and blessed them, effectively establishing Joseph as the firstborn to receive a double portion of land, one for each son.

At that time, Jacob had fled to Egypt as a refugee. Outwardly, he appeared a poor, destitute old man, but he did not belittle himself. He was Israel, a prince of God. In faith, he saw future glory and abundance. When blessing these sons, he deliberately crossed his hands, placing his right hand on the younger son’s head. Joseph protested, thinking Jacob’s eyesight had failed, but Jacob said, “I know, my son.” Unlike his father, who blessed in confusion, Jacob clearly understood God’s will.

Afterward, he blessed his twelve sons, and his words determined each tribe’s future destiny, shaping Israel’s history. He was truly a spiritual man who discerned all things. On one hand, he blessed his descendants; on the other, he reviewed his life and made arrangements for his death. In Genesis 47:30-31, “But let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.” And he said, “I will do as you have said.” And he said, “Swear to me.” And he swore to him. So, Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.” (NKJV)

He knew God’s promise was the promised land of Canaan and made Joseph swear to bury him in Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac were buried, after his death. After settling his affairs, he leaned on his staff and worshiped God. This staff had been with him since youth, a lifelong support, telling the story of his walk with God—how a grasping, disliked man was transformed by God’s grace into Israel, blessing others everywhere. He had no regrets, so he leaned on his staff and worshiped God, the best ending to a life. May we too, when we meet the Lord, lean on our staff and worship Him.

Verse 22: "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones."

Joseph's life prefigures Christ. Sold by his brothers, he became a slave in Egypt, yet through God's presence, he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and rose to be Egypt's prime minister. Following the dream's warning, he prepared for famine. When it struck, he became a savior to many. When his brothers sought refuge during the famine in Canaan, he said to them in Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

But the author of Hebrews chooses to record one event: Joseph's dying instructions, found in Genesis 50:24-25: "And Joseph said to his brethren, 'I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'" Joseph, a revered prime minister in Egypt with wealth and status, saw in faith something better—God's provision for Israel. He foretold that God would send someone to lead them back to the promised land. He made his descendants swear that when they left Egypt, they would take his bones back to Canaan.

Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, at the end of their lives, foresaw what would happen after their deaths. In faith, they saw what God would do in the future. They died in faith, which carried them beyond death into God's presence. How beautiful this is! May we too have such an end.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and our hope is tied to Your promises. Help us today to see the heavenly promises, so our hope may be in heaven. Like the great men of faith in the Old Testament, who were sojourners and pilgrims on earth, give us such a vision to value our better, heavenly homeland. Help me in daily life to often look to heaven, knowing that today's earthly journey is temporary, and only treasures stored in heaven are eternal. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.