**Koinonia – 22 March 2020**

**The Hall of Faith: The Call to Keep the Faith...!**

***The TEST of FAITH!***

***HOLDING ON to GOD and HIS PROMISES in the FACE OF DEATH...!***

Heb 11:17-22

**Introductory Thoughts:**

• I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Heb 11 as we continue our series on Heb 11 called: ***The Hall of Faith: The Call to Keep the Faith...!***

• Jesus promised us in Joh 16:33...

• Paul teaches us in Rom 5:3-5...

• James command us in Jam 1:2-4...

• Peter reminds us in 1 Pet 4:12-13...

• **TESTS** and **TRIALS** are an **INTEGRAL** **PART** of the Christian life.

• **TESTS** and **TRIALS** are **DESIGNED** by God to **PURIFY** our **FAITH** (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-7) and to bring us to **MATURITY**...!
• **TEST** and **TRIALS** does not help **GOD** to see what our **FAITH** is like... **HE** **KNOWS**! (Heb 4:12-13)

• It helps **US** to see what is the **CHARACTER** of our **FAITH** and it is a **CALL** to **LOOK TO THE LORD** and discover **HIS SUFFICIENCY**.

• **FAITH** by definition is **LOOKING AWAY** from **OURSELVES** and **LOOKING TO GOD**...!

• One of the **TESTS** and **TRIALS** that reveals the **CHARACTER** of our **FAITH** the **CLEAREST** is **DEATH**...

• When someone faces **DEATH**, you see most **CLEARLY** where their **FOCUS** and **HOPE** are.

• In Heb 11:17-22 we find **FOUR** **MEN** who undergone ***The TEST of FAITH...*** Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and this is what will **SEE**: We will see these men, ***HOLDING ON to GOD and HIS PROMISES in the FACE OF DEATH...!***

• Lets read Heb 11:17-22...

• These verses are talking about the **PATRIARCHS** and you find that there is a theme of **TESTING** and **DEATH** running through these verses...

• Heb 11:13 already stated that all of them **DIED** without having **RECEIVED** the things **PROMISED**, and these verses **REVEALS** to us **HOW** they **HELD** **ON** to **GOD** and **HIS PROMISES** in the **FACE OF DEATH**.

**Teaching Points:**

• I want to distract **FIVE DISCIPLINES** that you need to **PRACTISE** when your **FAITH** is **TESTED** and in the **FACE** of **DEATH**:

**1. HOLD ON to GOD’S WORD... (v17-18)**

• Verse 17-18 refers to Gen 22:1-2 where Abraham was subjected by God to a **TEST** and where **ABRAHAM** responded with **GREAT** **FAITH**...!

• Abraham did **NOT DESIGN** or **SIGN UP** for this test. It came from **GOD HIMSELF**...

• This test was a **TEST** of **TRUST** and **DEVOTION**...

• It was **TEST** of **TRUST** in that God had said that Abraham’s **OFFSPRING** will come through **ISAAC**... that is what God has **PROMISED**... and **NOW**, God was asking Abraham to offer **ISAAC**.

• This must have seemed to Abraham, just as it seems to us, as a **CONTRADICTION**... How can this **WORK**...?

• **BUT** Abraham had a **CLEAR PROMISE** from God and a **CLEAR** **COMMAND**... He didn’t know how these two would be **RESOLVED**, but he **KNEW** that **GOD** said **BOTH**, and so he obeyed... He **HELD** **ON** to **GOD’S** **WORD** in both cases and his obedience was **IMMEDIATE**... He didn’t try and **REASON** it out with **GOD**... He **SIMPLY TRUSTED GOD** and **OBEYED**...!

• This was also a **TEST** of **DEVOTION** namely will Abraham **HOLD** **ON** to **GOD** and **HIS** **WORD** or to **ISAAC**...

• Isaac was God’s **GIFT** to Abraham and the question would be if He would **LOVE** the **GIFT** above the **GIVER**...? Will he take a **GOOD** thing that God has **GIVEN** and **ELEVATE** it to a **WRONG** **PLACE** so that it would result in him being **UNFAITHFUL** in his **DEVOTION** to **GOD’S WORD**... God’s **COMMAND**...?

• The **CHANCE** was that **ISAAC** could become an **IDOL** for Abraham... where this **GOOD** **GIFT** of God could get **POSSESSION** of his **HEART** and **DETHRONE** **GOD** and His **WORD** in Abraham’s life...

• It **DIDN’T**...! Abraham helps us to see that in **TESTS** we need to **HOLD ON** to **GOD’S WOR**D and **LET** **GO** of **IDOLS**...!

**2. MEDITATE on GOD’S POWER... (v19)**

• In verse 19 we find something of the **GREATNESS** of Abraham’s faith in the midst of this **TEST**...

• Abraham didn’t reason **WITH** God about what He commanded, but he reasoned **ABOUT** God...

• This is the way the Hebrews writer says that Abraham made **SENSE** out of God’s command to offer **ISAAC**, the son of **PROMISE** through whom the **PORMISE** of **GREAT** **DECENDANTS** would come...

• He **CONSIDERED** this apparent **CONTRADICTION** and the **LOGICAL** **CONCLUSION** for him was simply: **GOD WILL RAISE ISAAC FROM THE DEAD**...!

• It have **NEVER** happened before, but Abraham reasoned that God **CAN** do this...

• From the **BEGINNING** Abraham had this through that God would do **SOMETHING** to **PRESERVE** the life of Isaac, because in Gen 22:5 he said to the servants...

• Abraham was both **RIGHT** and **WRONG** in what he considered... he was **WRONG** in that God had **ANOTHER** **PLAN** namely to provide a **RAM** for the offering... but he was **RIGHT** in that God is **ABLE** to **RAISE** from the **DEAD**...

• **LEARN** **THIS** from Abraham’s obedience: We don’t know how God will come through for us... we sometime may **THINK** and **PLAN** and **REASON** what God will do, but we never can completely **KNOW**.

• We **SIMPLY** need to **OBEY** **HIM** and **MEDITATE** on the **REALITY** that **HE** **IS** **GOD** and that **NOTHING** is **IMPOSSIBLE** for **HIM**...!

• He would **ONE DAY** provide **ANOTHER RAM** – **JESUS** – who would be **OFFERED** in the place of **SINNERS**... and he then would **RAISE HIM** from the **DEAD**, as Abraham considered God can do...!

**3. REST in GOD’S PROVIDENCE... (v20)**

• When **ISAAC** was getting **OLD**, he wanted to **BLESS** his sons with his eye on the **PROMISE** that God has given him that he would be a **GREAT** **NATION**...

• **ESAU** was the **OLDEST** **BROTHER** and was the one whom **ISAAC** wanted to **BLESS** – according to the **TRADITION** and **PRACTISE**... that was **HIS PLAN**.

• But we **KNOW** the **STORY**, namely how Esau actually earlier **SOLD** his **BIRTHRIGHT** for a bowl of **SOUP** and then how **JACOB**, under the **INSTRUCTION** of His mother, **DECEIVED** **ISAAC** in thinking that **JACOB** was **ESAU**...

• And so, **ISAAC** blessed **JACOB** instead of **ESAU**...

• When this came to **LIGHT**, the **RESPONSE** of **ISAAC** is what help us to see how what our **DISCIPLINE** should be when our **FAITH** is **TESTED** in the face of **DEATH** – we find his response in Gen 27:33-35.

• Although things did **NOT** work out the way **ISAAC** planned it, he submitted to the **PROVIDENCE** of **GOD** and he didn’t **RETRACT** the blessing...

• ***“Conscious of the overruling providence of God in his life in spite of Isaac's best intentions, he accepted that God had greater and different purposes than he had imagined. The blessing had been reversed and given to Jacob. It would remain Jacob's by the good providence of God.”***

• Things happen that we don’t necessarily **DESIRED**, **PLANNED** **FOR**, **HOPED** **FOR**, **CAN** **EXPLAIN** or **UNDERSTAND**, but **GOD** has let it **HAPPEN** in His **PROVIDENCE**...

• We must **REST** like **ISAAC** in that **PROVIDENCE** of **GOD**... He does have a **PLAN** and He is **BUSY** working it out...

• Prov 16:9

**4. REJOICE in GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY... (v21)**

• Next, we find that **JACOB** is mentioned, in his old age when he has now relocated to Egypt and found that his son Joseph is still alive...

• Just a **WHILE** ago, he was still convinced that Joseph was **DEAD**, and here he is seeing not only His **SON**, but his **GRANDSONS** as well...!

• In this, he must have seen the **REALITY** of God who is busy keeping his **PROMISE**... God has **SUSTAINED** his sons and his **FAITH** was that God **WILL** fulfil the **PROMISE** that he made.

• In the **MIDST** of all the **HARDSHIP**, **HEARTACHE**, **TREACHERY** and **TRIALS** that **JACOB** experienced in His life, when he came to the end of it, he saw the **SOVEREIGHTY** of **GOD** in the **GRANDSONS** of his “**dead**” son... and he **WORSHIPPED**...!

• This old and dying man was **REJOICING** in what God has done and in what God **WILL** do...!

• This is what the **SOVEREIGNTY** of God should lead us to – **WORSHIP**! When we face **TESTS** in our lives, may we keep on **WORSHIPPING** the **SOVEREIGN** **GOD**...!

**5. ANTICIPATE and PROMOTE GOD’S FAITHFULNESS... (v22)**

• The whole life of Joseph was one big testimony of the **PROVIDENCE** and **SOVEREIGNTY** of **GOD**...!

• If there is **ONE** **THING** that he would have learned through all the things that has happened with him is that **GOD IS FAITHFUL**!

• In the **MIDST** of everything that was happening he wouldn’t have **THOUGHT** so, but he would have **LEARNED** it in the end as he looked **BACK** on everything that has happened... and then as he looked **FORWARD**, he wanted to **INSPIRE** and **REMIND** the **FUTURE** **GENERATIONS** concerning that **FAITHFULNESS** of **GOD**...

• He therefore gave the **COMMAND** that his **BONES** must be buried in the **PROMISED** land, not **IF** but **WHEN** God gave it to them... Gen 50:25

• His bones then travelled with Moses (cf. Exo 13:19) and after they have conquered the land, we read in Jos 24:32...

• ***“The presence of Joseph's bones served to inspire faith for more than four centuries, reminding the sons of Israel that God had promised to free them from Egypt and bring them to a better place. His bones caused them to hope in God's promises, to believe that Egypt wasn't their home.***

***Even in the wilderness, after they refused to enter the land, they couldn't forget Joseph's bones. Even there, his faith somehow sustained their faith. His bones pointed them beyond Egypt and beyond the wilderness to the better place God had promised. And when they buried his bones in the land, they marked the fulfilment of God's promise - the one made to Abraham so many years earlier, the one that had been passed on from generation to generation. The burial of Joseph served as a poetic commemoration of the faithfulness of God...”***

**Closing Thoughts:**

• **FIVE LESSONS** that we can learn from these men:

***1) The most IMPORTANT thing to do is to keep the MAIN THING the MAIN THING...*** Give **GOD** the **TRUST** and **DEVOTION** of your **HEART** at **ALL** **TIMES**...!

***2) The GREATEST thing you can do is to PASS YOUR FAITH along to your children and grandchildren...*** The Christian faith is not a **SPRINT** and it’s not really a **MARATHON**. It’s a **RELAY** **RACE** and I am but one member of a team that stretches across the generations. The **BATON** **OF** **FAITH** must be passed on to the **NEXT** **GENERATION**...

***3) The SADDEST thing that can happen is to become BITTER in your old age...*** We’ve all seen it happen to people we know and love. They become **BITTER**, **ANGRY**, and **FILLED** with **RESENTMENT** because **LIFE DIDN’T TURN OUT THE WAY THEY THOUGHT IT WOULD**. Abraham had a promise from God but he never saw it completely fulfilled. Isaac had the same promise but he died without seeing it fulfilled. Jacob had the same promise and he died in Egypt. Joseph had the same promise but died in Egypt too. If ever any one had the right to become bitter it was these four men— Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. They lived and died with the promise unfulfilled but to their credit they never gave up hope.

***4) The HAPPIEST way to live is to realize that GOD’S WORK IS BIGGER THAN YOU ARE...*** God’s plans are **BIGGER** than yours and mine. Our part is to **LIVE FOR GOD** and to **PASS OUR FAITH** along to our children and then to our grandchildren. And we must live so that those things for which we are praying and those things we dream about may happen some day after we are gone. Here is a great goal: ***To have dreams so big they can’t possibly be fulfilled in our lifetime....***

***5) The MOST SIGNIFICANT thing you can do is to leave a LEGACY of FAITH...!*** What will you be **REMEMBERD** by and will it **INSPIRE** people to **GREATER** **FAITH**... Joseph left his **BONES** as a **TESTIMONY** of his faith... May **WE** aspire to leave a legacy that will inspire the **NEXT** **GENERATIONS** to **TRUST** in the **FAITHFUL** **GOD** of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph...!