

By Faith Joseph

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we continue our quick run through Hebrews 11, looking at the faith of saints of old. And today we'll be looking specifically at the life of Joseph.

But as we get going, I think it's worth noting the holidays season is upon us. Very grateful for the summer holidays to be able to get away, especially after a very long fall and winter of restrictions, of being able to get together with people and travel.

You know, one of the things that I remember very fondly as being a child was the opportunity to go on holiday with my family. And growing up in the States, we traveled extensively around the States. And one of my favorite places to go was to Colorado. I had family out there, though I grew up in Florida. We'd take the long flight out to Colorado and we'd spend winters out there skiing and summers out there hiking and spending time with family.

And I remember specifically one holiday we spent out there. It was I was probably about 10 years old and it was the summertime. And it was a day we were spending with family, didn't have much planned.

[1 : 04] And my dad suggested that we go to a place called Cave of the Winds. It was this series of caves that go deep into the side of this mountain. It was discovered in the 1800s and has since been turned into a tourist attraction.

You can get a guided tour of this area and learn about the history and the geology of that area. And when my dad suggested that, there was really no one else in the family that wanted to go but myself.

Everyone was kind of content being lazy that day. And so I wanted to go with my dad. And the two of us went together. And I remember the trip pretty well. There were these narrow caverns that you could walk through or narrow corridors that opened up into large caverns.

And you had these big stalagmites and stalactites, those big rock structures that look like icicles that grow down from the ceiling and up from the floor. But what I remember most about that trip with my dad was actually something that seems very insignificant.

And it was the fact that he was willing to hold my coat for me throughout our whole time in the caves. The caves, because they're so deep in the mountain, they stay at a rather regulated temperature of about 11, 12 degrees.

[2 : 12] And so I had brought a coat with me thinking that I'd want it but then didn't actually wear it. And my dad willingly held it for me. And I think this is significant because this isn't something my dad would normally do.

Not that he didn't love me and care for me, but he was one that wanted to enforce responsibility, right? If I brought a coat, then I was responsible for holding on to it until we got home. But I remember on this day, he willingly held my coat for me.

And so you may think, well, this doesn't seem like a really significant story at all, the fact that my dad would just hold my coat for me. But it's really that simple memory of that simple act of kindness that has stayed with me.

And I don't say this just for a sermon illustration. It's really a way, when I think back of the love of my dad for me, this is one of the things that I think about, even though he has done much greater acts of love for me that seem much more significant to my life, this is one tiny aspect that I turn to and remember my dad's love.

And so today, as we look at the story and the life of Joseph, we're kind of going to see the same effect take place. That we see the life of Joseph, the faith of Joseph, play out in what we may think is a very insignificant, inconsequential area of his life.

[3 : 24] Because we know that Joseph had this very incredible life, right, of being sold into slavery by his family, coming up and being second in command to Pharaoh. But that's not what the author of Hebrews is focusing on here.

He doesn't really focus on his life or his accomplishments at all. He focuses rather on his death and the instructions that he gives about his bones. And so we may think, well, this is kind of inconsequential in the grand scheme of his whole life and all that he did.

But that's not what the author of Hebrews thinks. And that's what we're going to look at today is the faithfulness of God to his people and Joseph's faith, which is revealed through the instructions of his bones.

So let's look together. There's a short verse, Hebrews 11, verse 22. By faith, Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

This is the word of God. Will you pray with me? Lord, as we recount the life of Joseph today and consider his faithfulness, Lord, help us to be reminded of your faithfulness to us.

[4 : 34] And so now give us a mind that we may know you better. Give us a heart that we may love you more deeply. May you be glorified through the preaching of your word.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, if you're not familiar with the story of Joseph, Joseph had, like I said, a very incredible life.

He would have been the grandson of Isaac, who we talked about last Sunday evening. Isaac, as we talked about, he blessed his son Jacob, even though he was tricked into do so, but we know that was a part of God's plan.

Then Jacob had 12 sons of his own, and Joseph being the second youngest and Jacob's favorite son. And so you've probably heard the story of the coat of many colors that Jacob gave his son Joseph.

And we know that his brothers despised him for the fact that he was the favorite. And so they staged his death and sold him into slavery in Egypt. And we see there that Joseph was still faithful to God.

[5 : 31] He served a man named Potiphar, which was one of the officers of the Pharaoh. He served him faithfully there and was actually got in trouble because of Potiphar's wife, who came on to him, and Joseph's resistance ended up getting him thrown in jail.

We know that he spent years in jail, but he had this God-given ability to interpret dreams. And that's what ultimately brought him in front of Pharaoh to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. And it was because of that that he became the second-ranking person in all of Egypt.

And so we know, though, that despite that incredible story, again, that's not what the author of Hebrews is focusing on here. He doesn't focus on his faith during his life, but actually the faith that endures to his death.

And so we see this in the last few, if we look back at verse 20, 21, 22, it's focusing on Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. And each time it's talking about their faith at the time of their death.

So even in this little snippet in the middle of Hebrews 11, we see this mini-theme of the faithfulness of God's people that endures throughout their life.

[6 : 37] And reminds us of the brevity of our life, even when we don't see God's blessing come to fruition in our life, when we're still living, that God's covenant is faithful and everlasting and certainly outlasts our earthly existence.

And so that's what I want us to focus on today, is the bones of Joseph. What do these bones signify to us? What do they symbolize and show us about his faithfulness? Well, three things I want us to focus on. One is that the bones symbolize Joseph's prominence.

They symbolize Israel's pilgrimage. And they symbolize God's promise. So let's look at that first one together, Joseph's prominence. What do these bones show us about the prominence of Joseph?

Well, that was kind of a speedy recap of Joseph's life that I gave you a minute ago. But I don't want it to be lost on the significance of his leadership in Egypt. You know, taking modern day analogy, if we think of the Pharaoh as the king, Joseph would be the prime minister.

And he was put in this position at only 30 years old. And Pharaoh actually says this to Joseph. He says, And so we see that Joseph was a man of great influence.

[7 : 54] In fact, he was very well loved by the people of Egypt because he governed with wisdom and equity. He led them through a long and severe famine because of his planning and because of

his wisdom.

He would actually would have been seen as somewhat of a savior figure because of the fact that he brought such a large population through such a hard time. But not only that, he actually transformed the economy of Egypt.

He turned them into a superpower because all the other lands relied on Egypt for survival. And so you'd think that because of a man of this influence and power would certainly be deserving of a full, honorable burial.

And we know a lot about the burials and the rituals that were valued by the Egyptians just by looking at history, right? We have these pyramids in the Middle East that show us of how they honored these pharaohs that died.

They buried them in great honor and actually deified them at death. And so there was a very lengthy, embalming process that these rulers would go through. And then they put them in these elaborate crypts along with great wealth, jewels, furniture, food, transportation, whatever it may be that they think they may need in the next life.

[9 : 11] And so we know that Joseph certainly would have been deserving of this reward, of this burial. But again, we see that he refuses this offer, certainly much to the shock or to the amazement of the Egyptians around him.

This is what he says if we turn back to Genesis 50 in verse 22 through 26. Joseph stayed in Egypt along with his father's family. He lived 110 years and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Manasseh, the son of Manasseh, were placed at birth on Joseph's knees. Then Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die, but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land, to the land he promised an oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and say, God will surely come to your aid and then you will carry my bones from this place. So Joseph died at the age of 110.

And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt. Now we see here that Joseph would have known better than anybody of the dangers and the seductions of Israel.

[10 : 24] For for years, from age 30 to age 110, he'd experienced such great wealth and great power. However, he certainly could have turned from God at that point and rested on his own ingenuity and his own strength.

But we see a time and time again that Joseph submits to the Lord. And now even in his death, he submits to God, not wanting to divert God's glory to himself by some elaborate Egyptian burial. And so that was option number one. At his death, he could have been buried like an Egyptian. Secondly, he could have chose to be buried like his father, Jacob. We know if you go back to Genesis 49, Jacob at his death gives instructions similar to Joseph does, but his instructions are different.

He says, When I die, take my bones back to Canaan that I may be buried with my relatives in the same cave as Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebecca and his wife Leah.

And so we see that when Jacob actually dies, all of Egypt mourns for him for 70 days. And then after that period of time, Joseph got permission from Pharaoh to take his father's bones along with his family back to the burial site in Canaan.

[11 : 33] And Pharaoh not only grants that, but he sends all his commanders and all his horsemen and chariot with him. So this huge grand procession goes and they mourn at the Jordan River for seven days before he's buried and they return to Egypt.

Certainly, this burial would have been available to Joseph as well. Because it was he that was the second in charge, not his father. And his father got this reward.

Certainly, that would have been an honor deserving of Joseph as well. But we see that Joseph turned down this opportunity as well. Instead, he wants his bones to remain in Egypt to be carried out at a later time.

And so that Joseph had been separated by force from his family years ago, we now see that he wants to remain with his family in Egypt even after his death. He doesn't want his bones to be put in some inaccessible crypt.

He doesn't want them buried in some distant lands. He wants them to be among his people to serve as a reminder of his prominence that came about by God's provision. Because just as Joseph had said to his brothers, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.

[12 : 39] And so then that brings us to our second point. Not only did Joseph's bones remind us of his prominence, but it also reminds us of Israel's pilgrimage. If we go back to Genesis 15, this is where we first see God make this initial covenant with Abraham.

And he tells him that he and his descendants will inherit this land. But he warns them that first there'll be sojourners. If we read in Genesis 15, verse 13, it says this, Then the Lord said to him, Know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country, not their own, and that they will be enslaved and ill-treated there.

But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. We knew that this promise to Abraham would have been handed down from generation to generation.

So we can be confident knowing that Joseph would have known of this covenant, of this promise of land, and even this warning of slavery. And so it's because of his faith in this promise that prompts him to choose to leave his bones in Egypt to be carried out at a later time.

We see in Genesis 50, where we just read, that twice he says in this short couple verses that God will surely come to your aid when he's talking to his family. There's no question in his mind that God will lead them out of Egypt into the promised land.

[14 : 08] And so because of this, Joseph recognizes that Egypt is not to be their forever home. He recognizes that the people of Israel are supposed to be pilgrims, just like the author of Hebrews says of his forefathers that they were exiles, that they were aliens and strangers in their own land.

And so he wants his bones to remain in Egypt to remind his people of this fact, that Egypt is not their home, whether they're experiencing a life of ease or when they fell into slavery.

Rachel and I, when we were in university years ago, we had the opportunity to study in Europe for a semester. And it wasn't in partnership with any university over here.

We actually had our own professors and our own students that came as a group to study. And because of that, we had great flexibility in traveling. We were studying the politics of the UK and the EU. So we literally, for a whole semester, jumped from place to place almost every three days, except for a six-week stint in London.

We truly felt like sojourners. And so in that semester, there was plenty of stories of good travel experiences and bad travel experiences.

[15 : 23] One free weekend that Rachel and I had when we were in London, we decided to go to Switzerland to do hiking in the Alps for a few days. And so we booked a flight from London to Zurich.

We planned on catching a train from Zurich to Interlochen. But the problem was that our flight from London to Zurich was delayed. And then when we got to Zurich, we couldn't get all the way to Interlochen.

We could get as far by train as the city of Bern. And so we got to the city of Bern at about 10 or 11 at night, but then had no other place to go. And this was before the time of smartphones, so we couldn't just pull up a map or call an Uber or book a hotel.

We were literally stuck in the train station. And so that's where we spent our night with no place to sleep and nothing to eat. It was exposed. It was outdoors. And so there we sat rather miserable throughout the night.

Another better experience of that trip was we had several days in Florence, Italy. And so there was a group of us that decided to go on this bike excursion, this tour through the Tuscan countryside.

[16 : 26] And so on that trip, we rode for several hours. Then we got to this old castle where there was this old winery. We got to tour the winery, went a little further. And then we had lunch at this little Italian restaurant that had this fresh bread and fresh pasta and wine.

And by the time that meal was over, none of us had any desire to get back on that bike and ride several more hours to complete our loop back into Florence. And so we see in those experiences both the good and the bad that can keep us, that can impede us from the desire of finishing our trip. You know, in both those instances, I was a kind of a pilgrim of sorts, going from point A to point B. And so the hardship that I experienced on that train ride that didn't end up getting me to my destination, I was focused on how miserable I was at that moment, rather than recognizing that still, in a few hours' time, I'll be at 10,000 feet hiking in the Alps.

And then when I was at that lunch during that Italian siesta, you'd call it, I had lost my desire altogether to complete that bike ride. And so Joseph understood these inclinations of his people

when they experienced great pleasure or when they experienced pain to forget about God's promise.

You see, when Joseph's family came to Egypt, Pharaoh gave him the land of Goshen for his family. This was some of the most fertile area in all of Egypt.

[17 : 52] And so when that famine had passed, this was an area that was great for raising families and raising their livestock and growing and multiplying, which they did. And so Joseph knew that they would be tempted to want to stay in this land, to forget God's promise and to forget that they are supposed to be pilgrims on a journey to a better country.

So Joseph wanted his bones to remind them to not to grow content with their surroundings. But on the flip side of the coin, he wanted his bones to remind them, to remember of God's promise, to remember God's promise when they experienced bad times.

Because right after, in Genesis 50, the passage we read where Joseph gives his instructions to his family regarding his bones, the very next chapter in the Bible is Exodus 1.

And Exodus 1 immediately tells us of how the Israelites were thrown into slavery by the Egyptians. So we know that this life of ease and comfort did not last long.

And so in the same way, Joseph wants his bones to remind them that God is their rescuer. Joseph wanted his bones to be remembered so they wouldn't grow content in their country and they wouldn't grow embittered to God in this case.

[19 : 16] And so this is interesting. This is really something that should be a part of our lives as well. When we recognize that Joseph wanted his people to be pilgrims, that's what we are nowadays also called to.

We just looked at 1 Peter. We went through that series not long ago in the spring. And over and over again, we are reminded by Peter that we are exiles and that we are sojourners in this world. That this world is not our home.

That should be a part of our DNA as believers. And so Jonathan Edwards, in a sermon he preached, shared this sentiment. He said, This life ought to be so spent by us as to be only a journey or pilgrimage toward heaven.

And so we need to remember not to cling on to the comforts of this life because our enjoyment of Christ is really the only thing that can fully satisfy us. Edwards goes on to say this in his sermon. He said, To go to heaven fully to enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows.

[20 : 25] But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.

And so let us hold loosely to the things of this world, not being captivated by wealth or success or the comforts of family and friends, to know that God has promised us a better country for those who believe in him.

But similarly, let us recognize that this life is hard, that this journey will be difficult. Edwards continues by saying, Long journeys are attended with toil and fatigue, and we should expect no other than to experience suffering, hardship, and weariness.

And so on our journey, we're going to face trouble. We're going to encounter sickness and job loss and broken relationships, but we can continue on in the holiness of Christ, relying on God for strength and endurance as we seek to walk with him in faith.

And so this was Joseph's desire to remain as a pilgrim. This is what he wanted his family to remember, that they are pilgrims. And the interesting thing is this. Joseph, who was forced out of the land of Canaan by his family, will be the one, his bones, the ones that leads his family back to the promised land.

[21 : 47] And so then that brings us to that last point, that these bones of Joseph symbolize God's promise to us. I don't know if you were old enough to remember the days before Facebook, but if you turn back the clock to the early 2000s, pre-Facebook, there was another website called MySpace.

It was one of the very first social media platforms, and it really took off. It was founded by a guy named Tom Anderson, and he built this thing up in a few years to the point that it was one of the most traffic sites in all the world.

And just after a few years' time of creating this website that was so novel in its time, he sold it for \$580 million. And he stayed on as present for a few years, but then decided, well, I'm done with this, and he broke ties entirely with the company.

And he realized that his investment would be better. His time and his money would be best served somewhere else. And he was right, because just a few years later, six years after making that sale, the value of the company plummeted over 90% and was sold for \$35 million in 2011.

And so as we look at the life of Joseph here, we've talked about the fact that he had great power. He had great influence. He built up this great life for himself and for his family, but also for the people of Egypt.

[23 : 10] Like I said, he really transformed their whole economy to turn into this superpower. But yet, just like Tom from MySpace here, Joseph cashed out, so to speak.

He recognized that it wasn't worth his investment to stay in Egypt, that the value of that country and their family was not going to last there. He recognized that God's promise was where great value came.

John Calvin said this about Joseph. He said, Wealth, luxuries, and honors made not the holy man to forget the promise, nor detain him from Egypt.

And this was evidence of no small faith. You know, we talked about this covenant that God made with Abraham that Joseph would have remembered. But before that covenant, God made a covenant with Adam.

And it was in this covenant that he told Adam that he would experience great blessing if he kept God's commands. We know how that story went, right? Adam could not and did not keep that covenant.

[24 : 17] And because of that, sin and death entered the world. And so these bones of Joseph remind us of that death. They remind us of our own mortality. But more than that, they point to a promise.

They point to a covenant of hope that we have in the future. You see, because God wasn't promising Abraham and his family just land.

He was actually promising them life. He promised to rescue them from sin and from death. And so we see this imagery of the bones not only used here in this passage in the life of Joseph, but we see it elsewhere in the Bible as well.

If we look to the book of Ezekiel in Ezekiel 37, the prophet receives a vision from God. And he's placed in this valley full of dry bones.

And God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy over these bones. And this is what he said. He said, dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says to these bones.

[25 : 21] I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover your skin. I will put breath in you and you will come to life.

And then you will know that I am the Lord. And Ezekiel says that he then sees these bones come to life and grow flesh and the breath of God is placed in them.

And then God said to Ezekiel this, Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say our bones are dried up and our hope is gone and we are cut off.

Therefore prophesy and say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says. My people, I am going to open your graves and I will bring you up from them. I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from them. And I will put my spirit in you and you will live and I will settle you in your land. And then you will know that the Lord has spoken.

[26 : 17] I have done it, declares the Lord. You know, as I mentioned at the beginning, the author of Hebrews doesn't focus on the faith exhibited in Joseph's life that we may expect.

He doesn't talk about his faith by being able to interpret dreams or his rise to power or his leadership skills. He focuses on the faith that Joseph had, that his bones would be buried in the promised land.

And so we see this hope that Joseph has is the hope that we have in the resurrection. It foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus because Joseph knew that God was a God of the living. He knew that the only way to dwell with God was to dwell in his holy land. And so that's the promise that each one of us have. To dwell with God in his holy land.

And the thing of it is now, we don't have to look to the bones of Joseph to be reminded of this promise. We have something far, far better. We are reminded of this promise through an empty tomb.

[27 : 23] For Jesus is the greater Joseph. He's the one who leads us into a better country, an eternal, heavenly country. Not by his dead bones, but by his resurrected body.

We know that Jesus is the one who endured the cross, who scorned the shame, and now sits at the throne of God. And so it's in him alone that we must place our trust, not in our own prominence, not in the comforts and seductions of this world, but in a God who keeps his word.

And so this really is the offer to all of us. It's a calling that God gives each one of us to come, pilgrim. To journey on.

To know that this is not your home. To find rest in Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

Because it is only in him that we may find rest in the promised land.

Will you pray with me? Oh God, we thank you for your promise. For your eternal covenant that does not end.

[28 : 36] Lord, we thank you for your promise is not based on our faithfulness, how weak and feeble it is sometimes, but on the faithfulness of Jesus.

Lord, thank you that we can look to the empty tomb as our hope. Lord, we ask that you deepen our faith. For those of us who may not know you, may you give us desire to be in relationship with you, to walk with you in faith.

We thank you that you're a God who loves us, that welcomes us into your family. We praise you for it in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we'll hear our last hymn sung, By Faith.

By faith we see the hand of God.

By faith our fathers roamed the earth.

[30 : 17] We will stand as children of the promise.

Fix our eyes on Him, our souls reward. Till the race is finished and the work is done.

We'll walk by faith and not by sight. By faith the prophets saw a day, when the longed for Messiah would appear.

With the power to break the chains of sin and death. And rise triumphant from the grave.

By faith the church was called to come. By faith the church was called to come. And the power of the Lord. And the power of the Spirit to the Lord.

[31 : 49] To deliver captives and to preach good news. By faith the church was called to come. And the power of the Lord.

And the power of the Lord. By faith the Lord. And the power of the Lord. And the power of the Lord. And the power of the Lord. And the power of the Lord.

And the power of the Lord. donating our souls reward. Till the race is finished. And the work is done. We'll walk by faith and not by sight.

And the power of the gospel shall prevail. For we know in Christ all things are possible.

[32 : 56] For all who call upon his name. We will stand as children of promise.

We will fix our eyes on him. Our souls reborn. Till the race is finished and work is done.

We'll walk by faith and not by sight. Now will you stand with me to receive the benediction taken from Hebrews 13.

Now may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus. That great shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will.

And may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ. Who be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Go in peace.