

By Faith Isaac

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Date: 27 June 2021

Preacher: Keith Knowlton

[0 : 0 0] listening and through my preaching, Lord, may I be an empty vessel that your Spirit may use tonight. And we pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, this evening, we are going to continue our brief walk through Hebrews 11. For those who are with us this morning or watching online, you know we talked about the life of Enoch. This evening, we're going to look at someone else who may be a little more obscure in this chapter. We're going to be looking at the life of Isaac, focusing on Hebrews 11, verse 20. Now, as we've been going through this pandemic for a year and a half, obviously, there's a lot of names that have come up over and over again. Government officials, people within the NHS, health ministers, whoever it may be, we see their faces on the screen every day. They continue to give us advice and counsel.

As to how we should proceed. But there's been another person who was at the beginning of this pandemic, someone who is a rather unexpected celebrity, you might say, and that's Captain Tom Moore. You probably all have heard of Tom Moore. He passed away recently, but this was the old man who decided he was going to do something to try to raise funds for the NHS. And as he was approaching his 100th birthday, he decided that he was going to walk back and forth in his garden before his birthday in hopes of raising 1,000 pounds for the NHS. And we all know how this story went, right? It received international notoriety and media attention because of just who he was and and this desire to help others. It went far beyond just raising 1,000 pounds. In the end, I think he raised over 34 million pounds and was actually knighted by the Queen in the months following.

And the reason I think that this man, Captain Tom, was so attractive to many of us, why it became such an international story was because he was just an ordinary guy, right? He wasn't someone who was in a great position of power or influence. He didn't have great financial means. We know that he was an army veteran and then worked for years as a manager in a concrete company. And so it's because of this ordinariness that I think he was so appealing to many of us. He was so endearing to many of us.

And so I think when we look at the life of Isaac here, they may share similar traits in the fact that Isaac too is a rather ordinary guy in a lot of ways. He's someone that I think we can easily relate to and someone that I think that we can learn from in this passage today. He's someone that wasn't an important leader. He wasn't this dominant figure, but he was someone who faithfully clung to the promise of God. And so let's look at our verse, Hebrews 11, 20. It's a rather short verse, but we're also going to be jumping around in the book of Genesis as well. But Hebrews 11, chapter 20. By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

[3 : 1 7] Now, if we read through Hebrews 11, this hall of faith, as it's called, we recognize that there's a long list of important Old Testament figures, right? We know that it talks at length about Abraham, who was the father of the nation of Israel. He was a person that God chose to bless him and his descendants. We know that Joseph is mentioned in Hebrews 11. He's this figure who is sold by his brothers into slavery and then eventually became second to Pharaoh. We see people like Moses, who led the Israelites out of Egypt, who led them through the Red Sea. It also lists judges and kings and prophets. And this is what it goes on to say if we go down to verse 33 and 34.

These people who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength, and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign enemies.

This kind of sounds like the stuff of an adventure novel, not what we'd expect of someone who's kind of put in the middle here, little old ordinary Isaac. But today, that's exactly what we're going to look at when we think of the life of Isaac. I want us to consider this statement. Isaac was an ordinary man of enduring faith in an extraordinary promise. And so we're going to break that down, take those in three bits. We're going to look at him again, an ordinary man of enduring faith in an extraordinary promise. So let's continue to look at him first as this ordinary man. If you're familiar at all with the Bible and the Old Testament, we know that Isaac was the son of Abraham. God chose Abraham to bless him, that Abraham and his descendants would be God's people. And we know that Abraham was very advanced in age, and he didn't have any children. But we know that God came to him and his wife, Sarah, and blessed them with a son when Abraham was 100 years old. And this son, of course, is Isaac.

And so the Bible doesn't really include a whole lot about Isaac's life, especially compared to some of these other figures that are listed in Hebrews 11. His whole life is really summed up between Genesis 25 and Genesis 27. So from those chapters, this is a little bit about what we learn of Isaac. We realize that he didn't have any land of his own. Much like Abraham, he was more of a sojourner. But we know that he became very wealthy. He had large flocks. He had herds and servants.

We know that he had an attractive wife, Rebecca, who at one point he denied was being his wife so that she may not be stolen from him and he may not be killed, what he feared at least. We know that he had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. It doesn't mention whether he had any other children or not, but we know at least of these twin boys. And we know that he favored his firstborn, Esau, and especially liked Esau by the fact that he could cook these delicious meals. He was an outdoorsman. He cooked all this wild game. And we know something about Esau's wives. He had these Hittite wives that seemed to make life rather miserable for Isaac and Rebecca. So we know that Isaac wasn't a warrior. He wasn't a man with a particularly big personality, it doesn't seem. But we know that God chose him in the same way that God chose Abraham. He was continuing his promise through his son Isaac, not based on any merit or efforts of his own. And so oftentimes I think when we look at our own lives, I think we have this aversion sometimes to being ordinary like Isaac, especially when you were young or maybe you are young and you think about wanting to conquer the world, right? You want to be this influential person. You want to be a mover and shaker. You want to make a difference in the world for Christ. And then life progresses and you realize maybe things didn't quite shake out like you wanted to. For the vast majority of us, we're probably going to live rather ordinary lives by worldly standards. You probably have a rather normal job where you may, most of your day may be taken up with meetings or emails, hours looking after your children, balancing your budget and maybe falling asleep doing the laundry at night. Things may not have worked out. Life may not be quite as glamorous as you had imagined. But it's important to remember back what we looked at this morning from Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6 where it says, without faith is impossible to please God. So it's not about our hard work or our good effort. There's nothing that we can do to please or to impress God apart from our faith. And there's actually a book that came out a few years ago by a guy named Michael Horton. He's a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in the

[8 : 26] States. And the book is called Ordinary. And it addresses this idea how in society there's this urge to do something important, to do something radical. But he reminds us that contrary to popular belief, it's not our own self-driven, self-shaped religiosity that God cares about. It's God's faithfulness to us, his people. So our Christian life, it's about glorifying him through our vocation, whatever that vocation may be, recognizing that it's probably going to be rather ordinary, rather unspectacular.

But nonetheless can be resolutely God-honoring work. He says this in his book, he says, daily faithfulness to our work and to our neighbor is precisely what enriches our lives.

And so being ordinary doesn't limit our ability to please God. In fact, in some ways it can enhance it because we're not distracted by this temptation to focus on our own exceptionalism. We recognize that we can trust in Christ because it's in him that we find our true value. And so this then brings us to our second point when we look at Isaac. We know that he was just this ordinary man, but he also had this enduring faith. If we look at Genesis 27, when Isaac is advanced in years, he's near death, and he realizes it's time to bless his son. And so he brings Esau to him before he dies. And this is what he says. He says, now I am an old man and don't know the day of my death. Now then, get out your equipment, your quiver and bow, and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare for me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat so that I may give you my blessing before I die.

And of course, we know how this story goes, right? Rebecca is within earshot. She hears of her husband's plan, and because she favors Jacob, she devises this plan that Jacob should disguise himself as Esau.

She will prepare this delicious meal and have Jacob take it to Isaac so he can receive his father's blessing. And so though it took a little convincing at first, we know that Isaac did bless his son Jacob thinking that it was Esau. And this is a blessing that he gives to Jacob. This is from Genesis 27 verses 28. It says, may God give you heaven's dew and earth's riches and abundance of grain and new wine.

[11 : 06] May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be Lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.

And so we see here, this is a really significant blessing. This isn't just your run of the mill blessing that you'd get in those days when a father who is dying would basically turn over his material blessings, blessings, possessions to his son, and then just give a request that he'd be remembered by his descendants. Isaac goes far beyond this, far beyond just talking about material blessings.

He really blesses his son with this universal sovereignty. He says that people will serve him, that nations will bow down to him. And so we see in this blessing Isaac's enduring faith, how he wholeheartedly relied on the blessing and the promise that had been given to him by God. We know that this promise was given first to Abraham and then God gave the same blessing to Isaac. It says in Genesis 26, 2 through 4, this is the blessing. He said, The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, Do not go down to Egypt. Live in the land where I tell you to live.

Stay in this land for a while and I will be with you and I will bless you. For to you and your descendants, I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands and through your offspring, all nations will be blessed.

And so we see that Isaac is relying on this promise. He's looking back at how God has promised this in the past, but he's also looking forward. He's fully confident that God will fulfill this promise even though he hasn't seen it come and be fulfilled at this point.

[12 : 59] And so even though he could have easily given up on God's promise, we see that he continues in his faith. He really could have stopped and just focused on his situation because it really hadn't changed at all since the point in time that he was first given this promise. There was little to indicate that God was going to fulfill his promise to Isaac. He didn't have any land of his own.

He was still living through a famine and was in exile. He didn't have many children, it doesn't say. One of his sons still wasn't married. The other son was married to these horrible wives. He could have very easily given up on the promise of God, but he doesn't here. We see that in this enduring faith, it's what's described at the very beginning of Hebrews that we looked at this morning. In Hebrews 11, 1, it says, And so we see that this conviction is active in the life of Isaac. It's this vital certainty that he's reaching out and holding on to the promises of God. He's hoping in the work of the Lord.

But it's worth noting that even though this faith was enduring, it wasn't a perfect faith. He tries to bring it about in his own way.

You know, we see examples of this often in young children. Maybe your own children, you remember this. In the first couple years of life, children are very dependent. They rely on you to do things for them. Then they hit this age at about two or three where they think they can do everything for themselves, right? Whether it's getting dressed or feeding themselves or doing basic tasks around the house, they don't want your help. And so when you ask to help them, they say, no, I don't want it, right? And so even though they are attempting to complete tasks that do need to be done, usually they do it in such a way that is slower, that usually makes a mess, that's usually not successful in their efforts. And so this is kind of what we see Isaac do here. Even though he understands the promise of God, he wants this blessing to be passed on to his children, he goes about it in his way, based on his preferences, because he favored his firstborn Esau. He wanted to carry out that promise and give it to his son Esau rather than to Jacob. Because we know that likely Rebecca was given this promise from God when she was pregnant with both her sons. In Genesis 25, 23, it says, two nations are in your womb, and two nations from within will be separated. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger. And so Isaac certainly would have known of this message that Rebecca received. And though we don't know his mindset later in life, it's fair to assume that he knew that God intended Jacob to be the one that was blessed. But again, he goes about his own preferences, and he chooses to bless Esau instead. And so we know what happens here after he blesses Jacob, and Jacob leaves. Esau comes in with his food, and this confusion begins. If we read in Genesis 27, verse 33, it says,

Isaac trembled violently. And he says, who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came in, and I blessed him, and indeed he will be blessed. When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, bless me, me too, my father.

[16 : 36] But he said, your younger brother came deceitfully and took your blessing. Esau said, isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he's taken advantage of me. He took my birthright, and now he takes my blessing. And then he asked, haven't you reserved any blessing for me? Isaac answered Esau, I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son? Isaac, when he figured out he'd been tricked, really could have been pretty ticked off, right? He could have given in to Esau's pleading and tried to rescind this blessing that he gave to Jacob. But instead it says that he trembled. And in fact, he confirmed the blessing that he gave to Jacob because he realizes that he was out of harmony with the will of God, and God had providentially intervened. And so how often do we, when we fall into sin, do we try to correct the situation ourselves? Rather than going to God and requesting forgiveness and his intercession, we try to fix it ourselves. We think that we need to make the situation better before we are able to go to God. But that's not what Isaac does here. We see that in Isaac's faith there's this element of submission. He recognized that he has sinned against God. And so rather than trying to fix this himself, rather than try to pursue these misplaced affections that he had for his son Esau, he turns to God in faith, knowing that it's only God that can heal and repair. It's only God that has in his sovereignty that won't be thwarted no matter what Isaac was to do. And so it's interesting to note too then that in this verse that we looked at in Hebrews, how it describes this blessing, because it says, by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. And I've read this a few times, and you might think this as well, why does it even mention Esau? Because the blessing went to Jacob, right? But I think there's significance in this blessing that he gives to Esau because of how it contrasts from the blessing that Jacob ultimately received. This is the blessing that Isaac gave to

Esau. It says, your dwelling will be away from earth's riches, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck. We see that Esau's blessing doesn't contain any of these eternal, spiritual blessings that Jacob received. And so I think that's the point of why the author of Hebrews includes it into this verse 20, because he's making the point that by faith Isaac recognized that God's blessing is exclusively reserved for God's people. There's no way for anyone outside of God's people to receive that eternal blessing of God's promise. And so what is that extraordinary promise then?

We've talked about Isaac in his, with his ordinary, that he's an ordinary man with enduring faith. What's this extraordinary promise? What is the object of his faith?

If you're like me, you may have been following the European championships and especially with Scotland having gotten to the finals for the first time in, was it 25 years or so? Many of us, I'm sure, have been following along. And there's no doubt there's been some Scottish fans who placed some money, some wagers, some bets that Scotland may win a game, that they may beat England, that they may advance to the knockout round. I'm sure they had great confidence when they placed those bets that Scotland would win, right? So it's not a problem with their faith. Their faith wasn't the problem. Unfortunately, it was the object of their faith. And so you see that faith without a proper foundation actually usually turns into nothing more than foolishness. However, we see in this case that Isaac's faith was founded on an extraordinary promise, a promise of something better to come.

We see in Hebrews 11, at the very end of that chapter, in verse 39 and 40, it says this, these, talking about all these figures that were mentioned, these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. Since God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect. And so, so often in our society, we desire this instant gratification, right? We don't want to wait for our reward. We are impatient.

[21 : 43] We want our reward. What we think we are due, we want it now. And we even see this within the church. We see this temptation to maybe believe in the prosperity gospel, to think that our faithfulness needs to be rewarded right now with material wealth. We'd rather focus on our earthly prosperity rather than on the heavenly riches that we've been promised. But here we see that Isaac wasn't concerned with his current condition. He was looking much further beyond. So that's the extraordinary blessing that Isaac received and that he passed on to his son, Jacob. It wasn't this temporary, temporal, worldly blessing. He was pointing him forward to the eternal blessing that we experience through the coming of Jesus. And so that's that extraordinary promise that God promised to send his son to be our redeemer, that he would come to earth and live a perfect life. He would die a horrible death to be a sacrifice for our sins, that we may avoid his divine judgment and we can be reconciled to God.

And so throughout the book of Hebrews, we see that the author, he mentions over and over again, he refers to Jesus as our high priest. He is the one who can save us completely, all those who come to God through him.

And so if Isaac, we know that there's these different covenants in the Bible. Isaac lived under one of these old covenants. And so if Isaac, in the dim light of this old covenant that pointed forward to Christ, though he didn't know how it was going to happen or who was going to come, he could still have faith in God. He could still have fellowship and communion with him.

How much more can we, as we share in that promise of the new covenant, now that we live under the blaze of Calvary, under the shadow of the cross of Jesus, how much greater should our faith be?

The great thing about Isaac's faith is that it gave him full perspective. He was able to look back at the promise of God, but also look forward. That though that promise wasn't fulfilled during his life, he knew that God was going to keep his word.

[24 : 05] And so through faith, we can do the same. We can look back to the work of Christ on the cross, who provided our means of salvation, who welcomed us into relationship with the Father.

But we can also look forward. Our faith allows us to look forward to when Christ will come again, when we, along with all these Old Testament figures, will experience perfect communion with God.

And so that's the extraordinary promise that you and I have been given today, together with these Old Testament heroes, we share in this heavenly calling, where we have been made perfect and we can enter in to perfect relationship with God through the Son, our perfect mediator.

Let's pray. Lord, so often we feel small and insignificant. But we recognize that you are great.

And we recognize today that through our faith, we receive your righteousness. And through our faith, you are pleased. And so, God, we ask that you strengthen our faith.

[25 : 21] May we have faith looking back to the promises that have been fulfilled in Jesus and looking forward to the promises to come.

May we desire to walk with you, to have perfect communion with the Father. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we're going to listen to our last hymn together.

I know this was different than what we had on the initial order of worship. It's, I believe, it's Christ, our hope in life and death. There we go. Let's listen together. Christ alone.

Christ alone. What is our hope in life and death?

Christ alone. Christ alone. What is our only confidence That our souls to him belong Who holds our days within his hand What comes apart from his command And what will keep us to the end The love of Christ in which we stand Oh sing hallelujah Our hope springs eternal Oh sing hallelujah Now on the earth we confess Christ our hope in life and death What truth can calm the troubled soul

[27:19] God is good, God is good Where is his grace and goodness known In our great Redeemer's blood Who holds our faith when fears arise Who stands above the stormy trial Who sends the waves that bring us nigh Unto his shore, the rock of Christ Oh sing hallelujah Our hope springs eternal Oh sing hallelujah Now and ever we confess Christ our hope in life and death Christ our hope in life and death

Unto the grave what shall we sing Christ he lives, Christ he lives And what reward will heaven bring Everlasting life within There we will rise to meet the Lord Then sin and death will be destroyed And we will feast in endless joy When Christ is ours forevermore Oh sing hallelujah Our hope springs eternal Oh sing hallelujah Now and ever we confess Christ our hope in life and death Now and ever we confess

Christ our hope in life and death Will you stand with me for our benediction taken from the book of Jude?

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time now and forever Amen God bless NOW Amen Amen