

Main Idea: In Hebrews 11:13-22, we learn two things about pilgrims who are living by faith and longing for a better country.

- I. Pilgrims who long for a better country die well (13-16).
  - A. The promises of God affect the way they view themselves (13).
    1. They embrace the fact that they are foreigners on earth.
    2. They talk about the fact that they are sojourners.
  - B. The promises of God affect the way they view this world (14-15).
    1. Life is full of opportunities to settle for temporary pleasures.
    2. We must not live for what we can see if we want to enjoy what we can't see.
  - C. The promises of God affect the way they view the future (16).
    1. They live to please God.
    2. They know that what's coming is far better than what they're missing.
- II. Pilgrims who long for a better country know that death is not the end (17-22).
  - A. It's why Abraham did what he did (17-19).
    1. He offered his son as a sacrifice.
    2. He loved God more than he loved his son.
    3. He believed that God had the power to do what He promised.
  - B. It's why Isaac did what he did (20).
    1. He took action to help his sons think about the future.
    2. He knew the best thing he could give his sons wasn't available yet.
  - C. It's why Jacob did what he did (21).
    1. He finished his life looking ahead.
    2. He finished his life looking up.
  - D. It's why Joseph did what he did (22).
    1. He believed that what God promised would take place.
    2. He finished his life bringing attention to the promises of God.

Make It Personal: Two questions to ponder...

1. Am I heading for a better country?
2. Is there evidence that I am longing for it?

### *Scripture Reading: Revelation 21:1-8*

“We die only once. It might as well be for Christ.”

Werner Groenewald said those words at a conference addressing the subject of “Counting the Cost for Christ.” That was two years ago in October 2014. Just one month later he was killed by the Taliban in Kabul, Afghanistan, along with his teenage son and daughter.

Back in 2003 Groenewald was enjoying a comfortable life as a pastor in South Africa, with his wife, Hannelie (she was a doctor in a trauma unit), and their children ages 5 and 3. Yet God called them to go and take the love and good news of Christ to the people of war-torn Afghanistan.

And so they went. And so three of them died for Christ.

His surviving widow says it was worth it and wouldn't change a thing. “I don't think that we will even know 100 percent what the impact is of what we made in Afghanistan through the years. I think that we will know that one day, though, when we are in front of the Lord. But I believe that we made an impact on people's lives. I believe, also, that my family's blood that was shed is like the seed of the Afghan church and that there will be a thousand-fold harvest in the end, because I believe God has the last move.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this passage, see the Hebrews series preached at WBC in 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *The Voice of the Martyrs*, October 2016, p. 10.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

It’s a privilege to give our all for the One who gave His all for us. Our king was crucified for us. He took our sin upon Himself and on the cross endured the wrath of God we had coming to us. He died on that cross, and three days later rose again, securing our forever salvation.

Those who make the most of life *now* aren’t living for *now*. In the words of Hebrews 11, they are looking and longing *for a better country*.

We’re in the world, but not of the world. Citizens of heaven, yet living for the glory of our King on earth. This is how God has called us to live.

We are pilgrims.

And this morning we’re continuing a series called *Pilgrims in Progress*. We’re looking at some pilgrims in Hebrews 11. On Sunday evenings we’ll be learning from John Bunyan’s pilgrim in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

The original readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews were Jewish Christians, and they were experiencing incredible pressure to abandon their devotion to Messiah Jesus and return to Judaism.

How do you help people who are wrestling with fear? The writers puts the spotlight on Jesus, showing that He is the fulfillment of all that God intended for Judaism. He is the promised Messiah who is superior to Moses, Aaron, and Levi, whose sacrificial death on the cross is the final sacrifice for sins, a sacrifice that can cleanse any sinner from acts that lead to death so he can serve the living God. That’s the message of Hebrews 1-10.

The appropriate response? It’s to put your total trust in Him. And so he concludes chapter ten with this charge in verse 39, “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of *those who believe* and are saved.”

We’re called to trust in the person of God and act on the promise of God, regardless how we feel. That’s what faith is.

But what does faith look like? That’s what the writer illustrates for us in Hebrews 11. With Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and then Abraham as we saw last time in verses 8-12.

We learn so much from Abraham about what it means to be a pilgrim. We noticed three ongoing phases in the pilgrimage process.

1. God calls the pilgrim and gives him a promise (8a).
2. The pilgrim must respond by trusting God and acting on His promise (8b-11).
3. God fulfills His promise to the pilgrim (12).

This morning, as we come to Hebrews 11:13-22, we’re going to learn something else about pilgrims, specifically that they are *longing for a better country*. And this longing produces two tangible effects.

### I. Pilgrims who long for a better country die well (13-16).

Just watch how they die. Watch how they finish their race. When people are living by faith it shows up in the way they exit this world.

The writer of Hebrews shows this in general terms in verses 13-16, and then with specific examples in verses 17-22.

Verse 13 begins, “All these people [what people? the ‘ancients’ mentioned in verse 2 and identified in verses 3-12] were still living by faith when they died.” As the KJV puts it, “These all died in faith.” Literally, “they all died according to faith.”

What does that mean, to die according to faith? The writer elaborates with four participles in verse 13. They all died in faith: 1) not having received the promises, 2)

seeing the promises from a distance, 3) welcoming the promises from a distance, and 4) admitting that they were aliens and strangers on the earth.

What enabled the ancients to die well? Did you catch the motivating factor? The writer attributes it to *the promises of God*. They were still living by faith when they died because they lived by God's promises. Sounds like knowing God's promises is pretty significant! It is.

Let's probe that thought further. When people are living by the promises of God, it affects them in three very practical ways that are identified in verses 13-16.

**A. The promises of God affect the way they view themselves (13).** "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."

Take Abraham, for instance. According to verse 8, God gave him a command and a promise. Leave Ur and go to a place I'll show you—that's the command, and I will give you an inheritance—that's the promise, at least one of them. And by faith Abraham obeyed and went. Verse 9 says he made his home in the *promised* land.

Yet though he lived in it he never owned it. He lived in tents, like a stranger in a foreign country, just like his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob later did.

How do people living by faith view themselves? According to verse 13...

1. *They embrace the fact that they are foreigners on earth.* The patriarchs, says the writer, admitted that they were aliens [Greek *xenoi*, foreigners] and strangers [the word speaks of people living in a place that is not their final destination; sojourners]. Note that word "admitted" (Greek *homologeō*, "to profess, to declare"), for it indicates verbal activity. In other words, people living by faith don't just *think* about their identity as aliens and foreigners. They *talk about it*, too. Yes...

2. *They talk about the fact that they are sojourners.* Abraham did. He described himself to the Hittites in Genesis 23:4, "I am an alien and a stranger among you." Jacob gave a similar testimony to Pharaoh in Genesis 47:9 when he referred to the years of his "pilgrimage."

Do you see yourself as an alien and stranger in this world, as someone who doesn't really have ties to this world and who in reality isn't going to be here very long? Do you talk about it openly?

Teens, you'll have opportunity to talk about it when your classmates ask you to come to the big party on Friday and you know there's going to be alcohol. So will you, men and women, when your boss urges you to cut ethical corners at work in order to increase production.

Brothers and sisters, it's not the aim of a pilgrim to fit in and do what everybody else is doing.

By the way, one of the reasons we struggle with change is because we don't see ourselves as sojourners or pilgrims. If we're not thinking like a pilgrim, we'll want things to stay the same. Same house. Same job. Same seat in church. Same ministry. Same friends. And sameness is fine, unless God calls for a change. And when that happens, a person who sees himself as a pilgrim says, "I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord."

So the promises of God affect the way pilgrims view themselves. God's promises affect them in a second way, according to verses 14-15.

**B. The promises of God affect the way they view this world (14-15).** "People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return."

The phrase “country of their own” is one word in the Greek, *patrida*, lit. a “fatherland,” a “homeland.” It’s used in John 4:44, there referring to a prophet being without honor “in his *own country*.” That’s something this world is *not* to sojourning pilgrims. It’s not their fatherland, their homeland, their *own country*. That country is yet to come.

That’s why the patriarchs didn’t look back. When Abraham sought a wife for his son, he sent his servant back to the land of his origin, but he himself did not go. So too, after Jacob did return to Ur to find a wife and lived there twenty years, he still referred to Canaan as “my own homeland” (Gen. 30:25).<sup>3</sup> Joseph, likewise, had a similar perspective, as we’ll see momentarily in verse 22. Because these men knew God had promised them a country of their own, it affected the way they viewed this world.

Let’s make it personal, for the fact is...

1. *Life is full of opportunities to settle for temporary pleasures.* For what the author in verse 25 calls “the pleasures of sin for a season” (KJV). The patriarchs refused to do that, says verse 15. They refused to return. If they’d been thinking about the country they had left, they would have, but they didn’t.

Beloved, every day you and I are faced with opportunities to short-change ourselves, that is, to go back, to go back to our old places, to our old ways and practices in the world. Mrs. Lot looked back to Sodom and perished for it. Sure, the world offers pleasure, but it’s temporary pleasure, and we must refuse to settle for it. To put it another way...

2. *We must not live for what we can see if we want to enjoy what we can’t see.* It’s called *delayed gratification*, and it requires that we say no to the fleeting pleasures of sin in the present in order to experience the far better and enduring pleasures God has for His people in the future.

Granted, we need a biblical balance here. In one sense, yes, this world is our home, so we ought to live life to the fullest, for the glory of our Creator. But since this world is not our final home, we ought not get too comfortable in it.

So God’s promises affect the way pilgrims view themselves, this world, and thirdly...

**C. The promises of God affect the way they view the future (16).** It sure did the patriarchs, according to verse 16, “Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

We learn a couple of things here about people who live in light of God’s promises.

1. *They live to please God.* The text says that “God is not ashamed,” the negative implying positively that He is willing and glad to “be called their God.”<sup>4</sup> That’s what He does, for instance in Exodus 3:6 when He identifies Himself by the names of the men that please Him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

People who live by God’s promises do so because their greatest fear is to bring shame to God and their greatest ambition is to bring pleasure to Him. Furthermore...

2. *They know that what’s coming is far better than what they’re missing.* They’re longing for *a better country*. Notice that for the patriarchs, the better country wasn’t merely a future hope, but one in the present. Our text says they *were longing* for it as they lived. So, too, note the present tense in God’s assessment of them. He *is not ashamed*, even now in the present, to be called their God.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Helpful observation by Leon Morris, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Explanation by Philip Hughes, who points out this figure of speech called a litotes; p. 480.

<sup>5</sup> Observation by Philip Hughes, p. 480.

So don't feel sorry for God's people, no matter how much they're called to suffer for their King in this world. As Paul assessed it in Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Corrie Ten Boom said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."<sup>6</sup> She could say that because she knew that what's coming is far better than what she had to miss while locked in a Nazi concentration camp. She was looking for a better country.

Jesus talked about this future hope, didn't He? "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3)."

Let's take a moment to think about what's coming. Our citizenship is in heaven, according to Philippians 3:20. Randy Alcorn, who has written a well known book entitled *Heaven*, had this to say in a sermon he preached, "Often we think of Heaven as our going up into an angelic realm to live with God in his place. But in fact, the Bible says the ultimate Heaven, will be God coming down from His place to live with us in our place—the New Earth. That's the place He's making for us."<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps that's why God's Word uses so many "earthly" images to depict what's coming. I mean, what exactly are we looking forward to, a house with many rooms, a city, or a country? And the answer is, *all of the above!*

Jesus said He's building a *house*. In Hebrews 11:9, we're told Abraham was looking forward to *the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*. In Hebrews 11:16, we're told that the patriarchs were longing for *a better country—a heavenly one*, and that God is preparing *a city* for them. As F. F. Bruce explains, "There is, of course, no difference between the heavenly country and the city of God."<sup>8</sup>

Be assured we're not going to be floating around on clouds strumming harps. We're longing for a country, a *heavenly* country. And the longing for what's coming produces a powerful effect on how we live now.

On October 3, 1660 John Bunyan stood before Judge Wingate in the court of law. His crime? He had preached the Bible without a license. Listen carefully to the following court transcript, for we're about to hear the response of a pilgrim.

Judge Wingate: "Mr. Bunyan, you stand before this Court accused of persistent and willful transgression of the Conventicle Act, which prohibits all British subjects from absenting themselves from worship in the Church of England, and from conducting worship services apart from our Church. You come, presumably, with no legal training, and yet without counsel. I must warn you, sir, of the gravity of the charge, the harshness of the penalty, in the event of your conviction, and the foolhardiness of acting as your own counsel in so serious a matter. I hold in my hand the depositions of the witnesses against you. In each case, they have testified that, to their knowledge, you have never, in your adult life, attended services in the Church of this parish. Each further testifies that he has observed you, on numerous occasions, conducting religious exercises in and near Bedford."

John Bunyan: "The depositions speak the truth. I have never attended services in the

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<sup>6</sup> Source unknown, taken from sermonillustrations.com

<sup>7</sup> Randy Alcorn, [http://epm.org/media-files/pdf/Heaven\\_Sermon01.pdf](http://epm.org/media-files/pdf/Heaven_Sermon01.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Quote taken from Philip Hughes' footnote, p. 480.

Church of England, nor do I intend ever to do so. Secondly, it is no secret that I preach the Word of God whenever, wherever, and to whomever He pleases to grant me opportunity to do so. I have no choice but to acknowledge my awareness of the law which I am accused of transgressing. Likewise, I have no choice but to confess my guilt in my transgression of it. As true as these things are, I must affirm that I neither regret breaking the law, nor repent of having broken it. Further, I must warn you that I have no intention in the future of conforming to it.”

Judge Wingate: “It is obvious, sir, that you are a victim of deranged thinking. If my ears deceive me not, I must infer from your words that you believe the State to have no interest in the religious life of its subjects.”

John Bunyan: “The State, Mlord, may have an interest in anything in which it wishes to have an interest. But the State has no right whatever to interfere in the religious life of its citizens.”

Judge Wingate: “The evidence I hold in my hand, even apart from your own admission of guilt, is sufficient to convict you, and the Court is within its rights to have you committed to prison for a considerably long time. I do not wish to send you to prison, Mr. Bunyan. I am aware of the poverty of your family, and I believe you have a little daughter who, unfortunately, was born blind. Is this not so?”

John Bunyan: “It is, Mlord.”

Judge Wingate: “Very well. The decision of the Court is this: In as much as the accused has confessed his guilt, we shall follow a merciful and compassionate course of action. We shall release him on the condition that he swear solemnly to discontinue the convening of religious meetings, and that he affix his signature to such an oath prior to quitting the Courtroom. That will be all, Mr. Bunyan. I hope not to see you here again. May we hear the next case?”

John Bunyan: “Mlord, if I may have another moment of the Court’s time?”

Judge Wingate: “Yes, but you must be quick about it. We have other matters to attend to. What is it?”

John Bunyan: “I cannot do what you ask of me, Mlord. I cannot place my signature upon any document in which I promise henceforth not to preach. My calling to preach the Gospel is from God, and He alone can make me discontinue what He has appointed me to do. As I have had no word from Him to that effect, I must continue to preach, and I shall continue to preach.”

Judge Wingate: “I warn you, sir, the Court has gone the second mile to be lenient with you, out of concern for your family’s difficult straits. Truth to tell, it would appear that the Courts concern for your family far exceeds your own. Do you wish to go to prison?”

John Bunyan: “No, Mlord. Few things there are that I would wish less.”

Judge Wingate: “Very well, then, Mr. Bunyan. This Court will make one further attempt in good faith to accommodate what appears to be strongly held convictions on your part. In his compassion and beneficence, our Sovereign, Charles II, has made provision for dissenting preachers to hold some limited meetings. All that is required is that such ministers procure licenses authorizing them to convene these gatherings. ”You will not find the procedure burdensome, and even you, Mr. Bunyan, must surely grant the legitimacy of the States interest in ensuring that any fool with a Bible does not simply gather a group of people together and begin to preach to them. Imagine the implications were that to happen! Can you comply with this condition, Mr. Bunyan?”

Before you answer, mark you this: should you refuse, the Court will have no alternative but to sentence you to a prison term. Think, sir, of your poor wife. Think of your children, and particularly of your pitiful, sightless little girl. Think of your flock, who can hear you to their hearts’ content when you have secured your licenses. Think on these things, and give us your answer, sir!”

John Bunyan: “Mlord, I appreciate the Courts efforts to be as you have put it - accommodating. But again, I must refuse your terms. I must repeat that it is God who constrains me to preach, and no man or company of men may grant or deny me leave to preach. These licenses of which you speak, Mlord, are symbols not of a right, but of a privilege. Implied therein is the principle that a mere man can extend or withhold them according to his whim. I speak not of privileges, but of rights. Privileges (licenses) granted by men may be denied by men. Rights are granted by God, and can be legitimately denied by no man. I must therefore, refuse to comply.”

Judge Wingate: “Very well, Mr. Bunyan. Since you persist in your intractability, and since you reject this Courts honest effort at compromise, you leave us no choice but to commit you to Bedford jail for a period of six years (Editor's Note: This six ultimately became 12 1/2 for his repeated refusal to sign the license). ”If you manage to survive, I should think that your experience will correct your thinking. If you fail to survive, that will be unfortunate. In any event, I strongly suspect that we have heard the last we shall ever hear from Mr. John Bunyan. Now, may we hear the next case?<sup>9</sup>

The last of John Bunyan? More like the last of Judge Wingate. For it was while in that jail Bunyan wrote the most published book in the English language, next to the Bible, the book we’re reading together as a church.

This brings us to our second point. First, pilgrims who long for a better country die well, and they die well because they have placed their total trust in the One who died for them. Second...

## II. Pilgrims who long for a better country know that death is not the end (17-22).

In verses 17-22, the writer returns to the patriarchs and cites them as “exhibit A.” In each case he highlights something the patriarch did that revealed his conviction that death is not the end.

He begins with Abraham in verses 17-19, “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your

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<sup>9</sup> Transcript of John Bunyan’s trial on October 3, 1660;  
[http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic\\_id=39484&forum=35](http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=39484&forum=35)

offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”

People living by faith, pilgrims, know that death is not the end. That’s not simply academic knowledge either, but affects in practical ways the choices they make.

**A. It’s why Abraham did what he did (17-19).** Three things are mentioned here.

1. *He offered his son as a sacrifice.* Verse 17 begins, “By faith Abraham, when God *tested* him.” And oh, how he was tested!

You’ll find the details in Genesis 22. Take your son, Abraham, the one you love, and go to the place I will show you, and offer him as a sacrifice. It took Abraham three days to reach the destination on Mount Moriah (many feel the very place that God Himself would later sacrifice His own Son).

What a trip that must have been! To walk side by side with the son he’d waited all his life to see, knowing that once they reached their destination he would have to put a knife into his son’s body. Had Abraham not possessed faith that God was up to something good in this, he surely would have either gone mad or run from God in disobedience.

But he didn’t run. He did exactly what God told him to do. He trusted in the person of God and acted on the promises of God regardless of how he felt.

What does that tell us about Abraham? It’s quite revealing. His actions prove that...

2. *He loved God more than he loved his son.* Abraham was not a perfect man, but by grace he was a man who loved God more than anything in this world, including his own son.

Jesus had this to say about Abraham in John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

That’s what made Abraham tick. He looked ahead. He rejoiced at the thought of seeing the day of Messiah Jesus, and in fact he *saw* it and was glad. He trusted in a person he could not see.

That’s what faith is. For us, it’s looking back. For Abraham, it was looking ahead. He rejoiced at the thought of seeing Jesus’ day, actually saw it by faith, and was glad.

Beloved, God loves to do things that make us think about His Son. That’s what this test did for Abraham. Abraham was asked to offer his precious only son, and figuratively speaking Abraham received his son back from death. By faith, he looked ahead and saw another son, a descendant of his own, and rejoiced. For two thousand years after Abraham, God Himself offered His precious only Son who did die, and three days later received Him back from death.

Do you love Jesus that much? Do I? Are we willing to give up our best, whatever that may be, should the Lord ask? The only way we’ll ever lay our children and everything else we hold dear on the altar is if we love Him more than them.

But there’s something in particular that Abraham did wrestle with. Verse 19 says that he “reasoned” (Greek *logizo*, meaning “to reckon, to calculate, to have an opinion”). It indicates Abraham invested some mental energy into a dilemma. He knew that Isaac was the chosen son, the one through whom God promised to fulfill His redemptive plan to bring salvation to the world. And he knew that Isaac didn’t yet have an heir—he wasn’t even married yet. So how could a dead son produce a living offspring? He couldn’t. “So if I kill him and burn him on that altar,” Abraham *reasoned*, “God will bring those ashes back to life again.”

To put it simply...

3. *He believed that God had the power to do what He promised.* According to Genesis 22:5 Abraham actually gave his servants the following instructions, just before



he took Isaac up that mountain:, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

*We are coming back. I don’t know for sure what’s going to happen on the mountain, but I do know that we are going to worship the Lord there, and we are coming back.*

Here’s Paul’s commentary on the life of Abraham. Romans 4:20-21, “Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

Philip Hughes puts it this way, “What appeared to him to be an insoluble problem was for God no problem at all...It is precisely the powerlessness of man which provides the opportunity for the triumphant manifestation of the omnipotence of God.”<sup>10</sup>

Are you facing an insoluble problem these days? Learn from Abraham. For God it’s no problem at all. Abraham reasoned that death, should it come for Isaac, wouldn’t be the end. It’s why he was willing to do what he did.

What’s more, it’s why the next three examples in Hebrews 11 did what they did, for each at the end of their lives took action to do something that prompted others to think about God after their death. In other words, people who live by faith not only see beyond death, but they want others to see it too.

**B. It’s why Isaac did what he did (20).** “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.” What did Isaac do? In short...

1. *He took action to help his sons think about the future. He blessed them in regard to their future.* He didn’t just give his boys the “good life in the here and now,” but reminded them that God had a purpose for His chosen family, a purpose that began with their grandfather Abraham, had continued in his own life, and was now embracing them, and particularly Jacob, the younger chosen son. He blessed them regarding their future. Isaac’s actions indicate something else, namely...

2. *He knew the best thing he could give his sons wasn’t available yet.* It had to do with their future. You can read the actual blessing in Genesis 27. Ironically, Isaac was tricked into giving his primary blessing to Jacob and secondary blessing to Esau, but nonetheless, he concluded his life pointing his sons’ attention to the future, and specifically to the future work God would accomplish through them.

**C. It’s why Jacob did what he did (21).** “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.” Jacob ended his days the same way his father Isaac had. By faith...

1. *He finished his life looking ahead.* And...

2. *He finished his life looking up.* He blessed Joseph’s sons (you can read the blessing in Genesis 48), and he worshipped as he leaned on his staff. Faith lives with its eyes on the future. But faith also lives with its eyes in the present fixed on God.

That final statement says a lot to us about worship. Sure, you can worship God in a church building, but you can also worship Him on your bed as you’re taking your final breath. Worship is simply an activity intended to bring honor to God, and that includes giving a blessing to your grandkids.

**D. It’s why Joseph did what he did (22).** “By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.”

It’s interesting that of all the things that Joseph did in his life to put his faith on display—and he did many—the writer of Hebrews chose to highlight this event. He says

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Hughes, p. 483.

that when Joseph was about to die, he talked about the exodus and gave instructions concerning what to do with his bones, and he did them both *by faith*. His first activity indicates that...

1. *He believed that what God promised would take place.* So much so that, according to Genesis 50:24, he said this 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 on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Joseph went to his grave believing that what God promised God would do. But not only did he believe those promises...

2. *He finished his life bringing attention to the promises of God.* And he did it in an attention grabbing sort of way. "Take my bones with you," he told his relatives. And Genesis 50:25 says he made them swear on oath that they would.

That's interesting. Joseph had spent all but the first seventeen years of his 110 year life in Egypt, yet he didn't want his bones left in Egypt. Why not?

I don't think Joseph was being sentimental. In one sense, dirt is dirt. Whether his body lay in Egypt or Canaan didn't really matter.

But it did matter. By requesting his bones be transferred to the promised land he was making a statement designed to point future generations to the promises of God, namely to the promise of His coming redemption.

"God is going to rescue our people," affirmed Joseph. "He's going to deliver us from bondage in this country and take us to the land of promise. And though I'll be dead and gone when it happens, I want my bones to be there, as a final testimony to the fact that this man believed God!"

And that's what happened. When the exodus occurred a couple hundred years later, Moses took Joseph's bones from Egypt (Exod. 13:19), carried them through the wilderness for forty years, until finally Joshua buried them in Canaan at Shechem (Josh. 24:32).

So let all this sink in. We've just pondered four generations of faithful pilgrims, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. These men did not have a Bible, like we have, but they did have a few verbal promises from God. And by faith, they chose to trust in the person of God and act on those promises of God regardless how they felt. All these men had a faith that looked beyond death, and they did so because they knew that death is not the end.

#### Make It Personal: Two questions to ponder...

1. *Am I heading for a better country?* You say, "How can I know for sure?" Let there be no misunderstanding. It's *by faith*, and specifically by faith in the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. If you have repented and put your faith in Jesus Christ, you are heading for the heavenly country. If Christ is not your hope and trust, then you will go to a place of torment the Bible calls hell.

Dear friend, today is the day of salvation. Be honest with yourself. Am I heading for a better country? Then, a second question...

2. *Is there evidence that I am longing for it?* Not just heading there, but *longing* for it. Is it apparent to those who are watching my life that I believe the best is yet to come?

**Communion to follow**