

“Joseph’s Confession of Faith”

Hebrews 11:22

INTRO:

Do you like concise statements that sum up where a person stands in a very few eloquent words? Remember, from your history class, the speech that Patrick Henry made in the Virginia Legislature? The summary of the whole speech was, *“Give me liberty, or give me death”* Nathan Hale, with the hangman’s rope around his neck, said, *“I regret that I have but one life to give for my country.”* Or Abraham Lincoln’s stirring rhetoric at Gettysburg, *“That government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”*

While these statements and others like them stir me, there are other testimonies which move me to the core of my being. One such declaration is that of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in April of 1521. When asked if he renounced his books, Luther, looking death right square in the face, said: *“Unless I convicted by Scripture and plain reason -- I do not accept the authority of Popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other -- my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me.”* This is the essence of what made Martin Luther able to stand alone for truth. His conscience was captive to the Word of God. The act of faith the

writer of Hebrews recorded in **Hebrews 11:22** is very similar to Luther's great Worms testimony. As we explore this text together, we will discover that like Luther, **Joseph's** conscience was God's willing captive, and that fact led to his greatest single statement of faith

A. ***“By faith, Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.”***

(**Hebrews 11:22**). Each of these statements in **Hebrews 11** summarizes a saint's whole life in a sentence or two. Each verse also tells us what difference faith made in their lives. What aspect of Joseph's life would God the Holy Spirit chose to highlight in this place? Many ideas come to mind. For example, the writer could have mentioned Joseph's faithfulness to God in the face of Potiphar's wife's advances, or his faithfulness under the stress of an unjust imprisonment. Perhaps, we could even find an allusion to Joseph's forgiving his brothers and not exacting revenge for what they did to him. While each of these examples is significant, the writer chose instead to cite Joseph's action at his death. Why is Joseph's statement so significant?

B. First, this statement on Joseph's deathbed is important because, Joseph, like his father, grandfather, and great grandfather before him, planned for an event God promised, but had not yet done. Joseph was laying plans for a future still distant.

1. The motivation for Joseph's act of faith was not a new revelation from God. It was simply remembering and keeping before his mind the promise that God gave to Abraham in **Genesis 15:13-14**

“And God said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.’”

2. We may be tempted to say things like, *“I wouldn't have any difficulty trusting God and believing what He said, if He would reveal Himself to me like He did to Abraham and Jacob.”* However, receiving a revelation from God does not necessarily produce faith. Remember, too, our friend Thomas, he said that unless he put his fingers in the holes in the Lord's hands and thrust his hand in the hole in His side, he would not believe. In **John 20:29** Jesus gently rebuked him.

“Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

In Joseph's case there was no direct revelation. Joseph remembered the promise given to Abraham and repeated to him by his father, he believed it, and made plans accordingly. So, we too should believe what God has promised in His Word, and make our plans according to His Word.

3. Joseph understood he was not going to see the Exodus. The Exodus was still many generations in the future. Still, he prepared the people of God for that day. He asserted it was coming. Then he commanded them to take his body with them when they left Egypt for the Promised Land.

C. There is a tremendous truth in all of this that we must see before we run on. Joseph's dying confession was an outgrowth of a life lived in fellowship with the living God. Joseph demonstrated the relationship he had with God every step of the way. Joseph practiced a close walk with God in the hard times and in the good times. Trial did not trip him up and material prosperity did not keep him from being faithful to God. A life of principled obedience and relationship prepared Joseph to make this command when he died. There is one more question that we need to try to answer before we complete our study. Why did Joseph take these steps?

II. Joseph's Rationale for His Command

A. First, this step was important to Joseph because he was an important official in Egypt. Joseph did not want to be remembered in history as an Egyptian. He wanted his sons and everyone else to know that he was a Hebrew and served the Hebrew God!

B. Second, Joseph may have done this because Egyptians worshiped their departed Pharaoh's as gods. He may have feared that they might try to deify him after his death. He wanted no part in that process.

C. Third, he openly identified with the Jews to encourage the faith of his brothers and their children. Being a child of the promise was more important to Joseph than being a power broker in the most powerful nation on the face of the earth.

D. Finally, and most importantly, he did it because he wanted to please God. How many things do we do every day, not because it is popular, not because we gain some benefit from it, but simply because it pleases God? I think the answer to this question reveals a lot about where we are spiritually. Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might ***“walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God”*** (Colossians 1:10). May God help us to be found in this verse.