

Introduction to Sermon of 4.19.20

Today's remarks are directed primarily to those that Peter called a **peculiar people**. (1 Peter 2:9). That word – “peculiar” – is understood today as something odd, quirky or different.

But the truth is that old English expression conveys very imperfectly the meaning of the original term. It literally means “a people for a purchased possession”, or for a treasure. It is the same idea as found in Ephesians 1:14 (**Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory**) and again in Exodus 19:5 (**Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine**). In Malachi it is rendered **jewels** or special treasure. (Malachi 3:17)

Similar descriptions were originally employed towards the Israelitish people. So we read, in addition to Exodus 19:5 that I just gave you, Deuteronomy 7:6 (**For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth**), very similarly Deuteronomy 14:2 (**For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth**) and finally Deuteronomy 26:18 (**And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments**).

All of this applies to today's spiritual Israel, his sheep, his church. These people are the subject of the Lord's peculiar regard. They are his vineyard, of which he says **I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day**. (Isaiah 27:3). All things are theirs – all things (1 Corinthians 3:21, 22) including **eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand**. (John 10:28).

These are the fortunate people that I address today.

Hebrews 11 – Continued (April 19, 2020)

We continue with the subject of “faith”, and specifically the folks discussed in Chapter 11 of Hebrews. Faith is one of the principal things of religion, one of its first requirements, and is vital to our Christian sojourn. Faith, says Dr. Gill, *is a grace of great account: God has put an honour upon it, by making it the receiver of all his gifts, and that gives glory to God, and without it nothing is acceptable to him; it answers many excellent uses and purposes in experience; it is that by which saints live upon Christ in this world, and look to the glories of another.* So, faith is a topic worthy of our ongoing attention and consideration.

Remember, the Bible gives us a concise definition of “faith”, so we need not flounder. **Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.** (Hebrews 11:1).

Like popcorn, the word “faith” springs from virtually every page of the New Testament. Ben just did a sermon back on March 1 entitled “Assurance of Faith” based on Hebrews 10:22: **Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.** That sermon – which contains many, many verses about “faith” – can be found in PDF format and/or can be listened to at our website, www.godhatesfags.com.

On a recent preaching trip, another wonderful verse about “faith” hit me up aside the head when my favorite travel mate looked on her Charles Spurgeon “Morning and Evening” App and was straightaway presented with Mark 11:22. For context, let’s consider Mark 11:20-26:

²⁰ And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

²¹ And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

²² And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

²³ For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

²⁴ Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

²⁵ And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

²⁶ But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. [Emphasis added]

Here is what Spurgeon wrote on Mark 11:22 --

Faith is the foot of the soul by which it can march along the road of the commandments. Love can make the feet move more swiftly; but faith is the foot which carries the soul. Faith is the oil enabling the wheels of holy devotion and of earnest piety to move well; and without faith the wheels are taken from the chariot, and we drag heavily. With faith I can do all things; without faith I shall neither have the inclination nor the power to do anything in the service of God. If you would find the men who serve God the best, you must look for the men of the most faith. Little faith will save a man, but little faith cannot do great things for God. Poor Little-faith could not have fought "Apollyon;" it needed "Christian" to do that. Poor Little-faith could not have slain "Giant Despair;" it required "Great-heart's" arm to knock that monster down. Little faith will go to heaven most certainly, but it often has to hide itself in a nut-shell, and it frequently loses all but its jewels. Little-faith says, "It is a rough road, beset with sharp thorns, and full of dangers; I am afraid to go;" but Great-faith remembers the promise, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; as thy days, so shall thy strength be:" and so she boldly ventures. Little-faith stands desponding, mingling her tears with the flood; but Great-faith sings, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they

shall not overflow thee:" and she fords the stream at once. Would you be comfortable and happy? Would you enjoy religion? Would you have the religion of cheerfulness and not that of gloom? Then "have faith in God." If you love darkness, and are satisfied to dwell in gloom and misery, then be content with little faith; but if you love the sunshine, and would sing songs of rejoicing, covet earnestly this best gift, "great faith."

Brown's treatise on 1 Peter gets into faith regularly. He talks about the three major pillars of a Christian's walk: Faith; Obedience; and, Patience. Faith is mentioned in 1 Peter 1:7: **That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.** Consider this from Brown: *This salvation is said to be 'the end of their faith' – that is, I apprehend, the termination of their faith. The attainment of complete salvation shall no more be a matter of faith; it shall be a matter of experience. They will no more believe that they shall be saved; they will know that they are saved. * * * In one word – here Christians believe they shall be saved, here they hope to be saved; there they are saved.*

Sara –

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. (Hebrews 11:11).

Here we see this thing called "faith" giving this wonderful lady physical strength to have a child in her old age. The grueling process of carrying a child for some nine months and then delivering the child is ordinarily reserved for younger and stronger females. That's nature and common experience of humankind. But Sara's story is beyond the natural and beyond the everyday ordinary. *I believe, says Dr. Owen, that this was not a mere miraculous generation, but that she received a general restoration of her nature for the production of a child.*

Recall on the plains of Mamre the Lord promised Abraham that Sara **thy wife shall have a son** and Sara heard this promise as it was made. (Genesis 18:10). But both her and Abraham were **old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sara after the manner of women.** (Genesis 18:11). So Sara literally laughed within herself at the notion. When God called her on it, she denied laughing – but she laughed. (Genesis 18:12-15).

Yet this self-same Sara, at some point, displayed faith in the matter, which explains the reference to Sara *herself* receiving strength through her faith, as we read in the text. (Hebrews 11:11) It's as if to say this very Sara – herself -- who once laughed and scoffed at the idea, got the victory through her faith. On this, Barnes says: *Even "her" strong incredulity was overcome, and though everything seemed to render what was announced impossible, and though she was so much disposed to laugh at the very suggestion at first, yet her unbelief was overcome, and she ultimately credited the divine promise.*

Considering further the result of this faith, we learn that Sara, in conjunction with Abraham, produced a progeny **so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.** (Hebrews 11:12). What a truly marvelous result. There's nothing more numerous than the stars of heaven or the sands that lie on the shores of the great oceans. This is a pristine example of faith; it does not depend on human reasoning, philosophical probabilities, or foreseen operation of natural laws, but on the mere assurance of God.

History and prophesy reveal the fulfillment of this promise, with more to come. **For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return[.]** (Isaiah 10:22). **Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place**

where it was said unto them, **Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.** (Hosea 1:10).

We read more of this joint faith enterprise betwixt Abraham and Sara at Romans Chapter 4: **Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.** (Romans 4:18-20).

It is fair to say that this aged married couple helped each other in their faith, the two being inseparable in the Bible's telling of the story. This is a nice example of the Lord's people helping each other.

Isaac –

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. (Hebrews 11:20).

Two things scream out: (1) why would Isaac be blessing somebody that God hates? Romans 9:13 (**As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.**), and so on; and, (2) this faith event happened late in Isaac's long life. This is Isaac's big moment of faith!

As to the first, the story is found in Genesis chapters 27 and 28 and goes something like this. Jacob – in cahoots with his mother – deceived Isaac. They cooked up some good meat and put **skins of the kids of the goats upon** Jacob's hands and **upon the smooth of his neck** (Genesis 27:16) so he would feel like hairy Esau. So prepared, Jacob

went to the old and mostly blind Isaac seeking the blessing, which he got.

No sooner had Jacob left Isaac's presence with the blessing secured in hand than Esau showed up seeking that blessing, but it was too late. With only one spiritual, covenant blessing available, Isaac did the next best; he gave Esau a secular blessing. As Dr. Gill says, *Esau's blessings were merely temporal ones*. "Temporal" means "relating to worldly as opposed to spiritual affairs; secular." So we read: **And Isaac his father answered and said unto him (Esau), Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above[.]** (Genesis 27:39). Too bad; so sad. **And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him[.]** (Genesis 27:41).

As to the second, even though Isaac was **old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see** (Genesis 27:1), he nonetheless ultimately realized the meaningful, effective and spiritual blessing was meant for Jacob. It had to be so under God's providences and plans. Remember, the blessing concerned **things to come** (Hebrews 11:20). So Matthew Poole tells us: *By this faith he did not only wish and pray blessings, but prophetically applied them to his two sons, to Jacob and Israel his seed the covenant blessings, and to Esau and the Edomites his seed the temporary blessings, God designed them, . . . Both these were things to come, and to be communicated to their seeds hundreds of years after.* [Emphasis added].

By faith, Isaac foresaw all these future events, foretold them and described them to Jacob and Esau, and they were to a tittle fulfilled, both literally and spiritually.

Jacob –

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. (Hebrews 11:21).

Now isn't that interesting? Jacob did not bless any of his own children in this account. Instead, the focus is on Jacob blessing two grandchildren. What's up with that?

The incident referred to will be found in Genesis 48, and though lengthy, it is well worth the read and extremely moving:

And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

² And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.

³ And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me,

⁴ And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.

⁵ And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.

⁶ And thy issue, which thou begetteth after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance.

⁷ And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.

⁸ And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these?

⁹ And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them.

¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them.

¹¹ And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed.

¹² And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

¹³ And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him.

¹⁴ And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn.

¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day,

¹⁶ The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

¹⁷ And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head.

¹⁸ And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head.

¹⁹ And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.

²⁰ And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

²¹ And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.

²² Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.

As I said, a moving story characterized by intense feeling of all involved. In summarizing, you will note: (1) Jacob invokes God Almighty's promise to him that occurred early in Jacob's life; (2) Jacob claims his grandchildren to be the same as his children, declaring they were his just as his own children were his; (3) Jacob then recounts the sad loss of his wife; (4) the narrative then has Jacob morph into Israel as he begins the hands-on interaction with Manasseh and Ephraim; (5) Israel then reminds Joseph that he (Israel) never thought he would see Joseph again but lived to see not only Joseph but Joseph's sons; and, (6) Israel then proceeds to bless the boys cross-handed, declaring the greater blessing on the younger Ephraim (over Joseph's objection).

And what of this worshipping while leaning on the top of his staff? Consider these thoughts from Barnes: *The meaning then is, "By faith when about to die he blessed the sons of Joseph; and by faith also he reverently bowed before God in the belief that when he died his remains would be conveyed to the promised land, and expressed his gratitude in an act of worship, leaning reverently on the top of his staff."*

The staff also was emblematic of Jacob's pilgrim state on his way to the heavenly city. So we read, for example, in Exodus 12:11: **And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's Passover.** And this from Jesus' instructions to his disciples: **And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse[.]** (Mark 6:8).

Jacob did this blessing when he was dying, a time when it would be taken most seriously and with high regard – a time when it would

be strongly impressed on the mind of those in attendance. It was also then obvious to the dying Jacob that he would not personally see the fulfillment of all the promises, proof that the blessing was given by faith.

Matthew Poole writes that Jacob *as a grandfather and a prophet, near expiring, weak in body, but strong in faith, bless(ed) Joseph, and each of his sons, preferring Ephraim the younger before Manasseh the elder, by laying his right hand on his head, and his left on the other's; and so adopts them to be his children, gives them the blessing of the covenant, as to their persons, and the inheritance of two tribes amongst his sons, as belonging to Joseph, as his birthright. A nice tight overview.*

Do not forget that Ephraim and Manasseh are counted in the twelve tribes of Israel after Reuben – called **unstable as water** (Genesis 49:4) – lost his birthright because of his transgression with Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). Further details are found at 1 Chronicles 5:1: **Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright.[D]).**

I love you. Amen!