

MORE THAN AN OLD BOX OF BONES

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INTRODUCTION: SCRIPTURE READING – HEBREWS 11:13-22

- A. Many years ago Solomon penned the words, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of rejoicing” (Ecc 7:2-4) – We know these words are true, but in the moment they’re so hard to believe!**
1. Funerals make examine ourselves, they put life in perspective, & they cause us to think eternally
 2. Every time I see a funeral procession or a drive by a funeral home my imagination starts rolling:
 - a. I wonder if the person was young or old, how they died, if they were a Christian, what situation the family who is left behind would be in, if I know anyone who knew them
 - b. When a procession goes by and I stop in traffic to pay respect, I watch those who are driving by and for a moment feel their pain and I think about the life that was.
 3. Funerals are often very difficult experiences, but they’re also opportunities to build & display faith
- B. When we read Hebrews 11, that great discussion about faith, there is one portrayal of faith that stands apart from all the others – The description of the way Joseph manifested great faith (Hebrews 11:22)**
1. When we read Hebrews 11 we are most often impressed by the great sacrifices, the strong stands, and the impressive works which the characters are praised for having performed:
 - a. Abraham offered Isaac, Abel made a better sacrifice, Noah built the ark, Moses chose to leave Egypt, Rahab hid the spies, people stood in the faith even to the point of death
 - b. These individuals stand as great real life examples of how faith obeys, trusts, and lives!
 2. Yet when we come to Joseph’s faith, he is remembered for the “funeral arrangements” he made. Abraham sacrificed his only son & Joseph gave instructions for his bones... Seems out of place
 3. His directions weren’t just for his own good. As they carried this box of bones into Canaan, there are some things they should’ve carried with them... They were carrying more than bones!

LESSONS ABOUT FAITH FROM AN OLD BOX OF BONES

- A. The first observation we should make is what the Hebrew writer memorialized... As they carried this box of bones into Canaan, they were bringing Joseph’s trusting faith with them:**
1. Since we are starting with the end of Joseph’s life, let’s take a moment and review what has happened that brought him to where he was.
 - a. Tell story of the background of Joseph – From childhood to “prime minister” of Egypt
 - b. Here is a man who’s life has literally been a roller coaster ride – He’s has been promoted and demoted, he’s been remembered and forgotten, he’s been loved and hated
 - c. Throughout all of this ride, he called his life, he maintains his trust in God & his faithfulness
 2. When Joseph is about to die, he leaves his family with some instructions which demonstrate an unwavering confidence in the promises of God & a hope based on them: **(Gen 50:22-26)**
 - a. Sometimes a person does not have the opportunity to give instructions for their funeral, but what if you did? What would you want? What a child of God requests is a testimony of their faith... What songs? The words are what you want said! Similarly, when Joseph gave his wishes for his funeral arrangements they spoke of his faith
 - b. Notice the confidence of His words – He doesn’t talk about what God might do or what he hopes for... He says, “God WILL visit... God WILL bring... God shall SURELY visit”
 - c. When someone dies people always ask, “Did they say anything?” Just imagine the children of Israel for years to come asking this and being told, “He said God would...”

3. His instructions were not just about getting the burial he wanted after his death, but about leaving his descendents with a strong reminder of God's promises and his confidence
4. When they carried these bones out of Egypt they would have been carrying Joseph's consistent focus on the Lord, regardless of the circumstance he was in:
 - a. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, Joseph appeals back to his desire to do what was right in the sight of God as he rejects her advances (**Genesis 39:9**)
 - b. When Joseph was in prison, and the two prisoners with him had dreams and were seeking someone to interpret them, Joseph told them that only God could do that (**Gen 40:8**)
 - c. When Pharaoh wanted Joseph to interpret his dreams, Joseph told him that God would give its meaning and that God would fulfill the dreams (**Gen 41:16, 28, 32**)
 - d. When Joseph names his children, he gave them names that glorified and thanked the Lord for the good the Lord had brought in Joseph's life (**Gen 41:51-52**)
 - e. When he forgave his brothers, he emphasized God's providence in the matter (**Gen 45:7-8**)
 - f. At the end of his life, he emphasized to his brothers that even though they meant to do him wrong when they sold him into slavery, God meant it for good (**Gen 50:20**)
5. As we go through this life, we need to join in with the Israelites and carry that box, carry with us the confidence and faith in the promises and the word of God! (**Acts 27:25**)
 - a. When we read the promises of God we can take heart that it will be EXACTLY as he has told us... Then like Paul we can get up and press forward through whatever we face!
 - b. Is that confidence supernatural? No, but it is the product of leading a God centered life!
 - a. A life of pursuing God's will, a focus on glorifying God in all we do, praising God regardless of our circumstances, recognizing His presence & work in our lives
 - b. A God focused life centers our attention on the unchanging God, an unshakable foundation, and increases our confidence in His promises (**Col 3:1-17**)

B. Another thing they should have brought with this old box of bones is Joseph's commitment to purity:

1. While in Egypt the Lord was with Joseph and everything he did was prosperous – As Potiphar, his master, saw this he soon positioned Joseph in a place of authority in his house (**Gen 39:1-6a**)
 - a. By what evidence we have Joseph is only 28 years old at most at this point, many believe he was younger than that (**Gen 42:2;41:1, 12, 46**) – Tremendous responsibility
 - b. Potiphar not only found Joseph to be a successful man, but also a trustworthy and accountable man. He places confidence in a man who was young, foreign, & a slave!
 - c. He places Joseph over everything in his house... The only thing Potiphar had to worry himself with was what would be for dinner... Potiphar did not even know what was going on in his own home because he trusted Joseph would take care of everything!
 - d. Of course we know there's one other thing Joseph did rule over... that was Potiphar's wife!
2. As Joseph faithfully served Potiphar and his house, Potiphar's wife tried her best to seduce Joseph, but Joseph consistently denied the opportunity to sin: (**Gen 39:6b-9**)
 - a. Verse 6 points out two things about his appearance – He was well built and he was good looking. Such words are only used to describe Joseph, Saul, David, & Absalom. Yes, he looked good, but he didn't let his appearance be a source of pride & his downfall!
 - b. She looked at Joseph with a very lustful desire... We can be sure her eyes were very flirty as well. She reminds me of the woman Solomon warned about (**Prov 6:24-26**)
 - c. Here's a powerful woman who has been flirting & now shamelessly tells Joseph to have sex with her and he, though young & single, boldly refuses to yield... That's strength!

- d. Notice how Joseph responds with two good reasons why he shouldn't commit fornication:
 - 1) First, he wouldn't violate his master's trust and confidence. Second, committing fornication with her would be a great wickedness and a sin against the Lord
 - 2) Remember, she's from Egypt, idolatrous, & a woman who doesn't know God! She is obviously a woman who doesn't have any convictions or morality to her!
 - 3) Joseph has taken this temptation and turned it into an opportunity to teach someone about morality and a respect for the one true and living God!
3. As Potiphar's wife continues to be persistent, Joseph's commitment to purity shines (**Gen 39:10-12**)
 - a. She is relentless in her pursuit! She tempted him every day! She wouldn't accept no for an answer! Finally a day came when it got physical – She grabs a hold of Joseph
 - b. Joseph had to have known something was up this day – He walks into their house and something was different. No one was there but him & her. Coincidence or planned?
 - c. She wanted Joseph and she wanted him now! So Joseph ran leaving his coat in her hands
4. Sadly, Joseph wound up having to pay a great price for his sexual purity: (**Gen 39:19-20**)
 - a. Potiphar's wife, out of desire and resentment no doubt, fabricates a lie about Joseph and of course Potiphar takes the word of his own wife over the word of this Hebrew slave
 - b. You can only imagine the anger that filled Potiphar when his wife told him her great lie and in his mind her story was confirmed when she showed him Joseph's coat.
 - c. Potiphar could have had him killed, but instead throw him into prison and he stayed there for at least 2 years. He's basically come full circle, back in shackles again!
5. When the children of Israel carried that old box of bones they were carrying with them a great example of purity... We need to carry that same box today! (**Psalm 119:9**)
 - a. Our society continues to become more and more sexualized. The way people dress, the things openly discussed, & acceptance of fornication... It's seen as normal! (**Eph 4:19 NIV**)
 - 1) Christians must know this is not normal... this is abnormal and it's a perversion!
 - 2) Due to the commonality & acceptance of lust, we must battle hard for our purity!
 - 3) Is the seduction of America impacting you? Do you find yourself wanting to dress in the sexual ways of the world? Do you enjoy sexual things in your entertainment? Do you feel you are losing the war in your mind over lust?
 - b. Our battle for purity starts in our hearts → We cannot expect to be pure until we want to be pure more than we want to be like the world or to be sexual (**Matthew 15:19**)
 - c. We need to understand that when it comes to sexual immorality we cross a line long before any "full blown sex" takes place... Draw a line of purity & stick by it! (**Gal 5:19**)
 - d. If you aren't married, have the determination of Joseph & keep yourself pure until marriage... Maybe you have messed that up... while it's not something you can take back, you can set out from this day forward to keep yourself pure (**Heb 13:17**)
 - e. Sometimes maintaining purity comes at a cost! It may cost you personally as you have to make sacrifices (**Mt 5:29-30**) to maintain it & it may cost you interpersonally as you interact with others who don't appreciate your purity – How bad do you want it?

C. As they carried Joseph's bones into the promised land, they were also carrying Joseph's perseverance:

1. As we have already observed, Joseph's life was riddled with its highs and its lows:
 - a. At only 17 years of age Joseph is sold into slavery – He's at the mercy of godless master, he is tossed from one foreign people to the next, he is surrounded by people who speak a language he does not understand, in a society that's foreign culturally & spiritually

- b. As Joseph walks with God he is blessed and succeeds in Egypt, but Potiphar's wife, out of jealousy, fabricates a lie saying he raped her and has him cast into a prison dungeon
 - c. There he prospers once again & by God's hand interprets two dreams. He simply requests that they remember him and tell Pharaoh about him when they are released
 - d. The baker & the butler are released, but they both forget about Joseph & he is left to sit there in prison for two years. He had to wonder if he'd ever get out!
2. Through all of this, Joseph continued to do right regardless of his circumstances: **(Gen 39:9)**
 - a. His faith and his morality was not regional – When he was forced to leave his home, he took his faith with him. His faith was also his own faith – Even separated from his father by many miles, not knowing if he'd see him again, he still did what was right!
 - b. Joseph never reasoned that his circumstances gave him the right to loosen his morals. He never reasoned that God put him here so it's God's fault if he caves to temptation
 3. Joseph shows great perseverance of faith & refuses to give up on God or himself! **(Gen 39:21-23)**
 - a. As far as we know he is never told by God that he'd get out of the dungeon & he doesn't know what God has planned for him. But, that doesn't change anything for Joseph since he walks by faith. His circumstances don't rule him, he rules his circumstances!
 - b. Through all of his trials, God was with Joseph and Joseph understand & appreciated that!
 - c. We never see Joseph blaming God for what he was facing, Joseph simply took whatever situation he was in & continued to live for God just as he had during his good times
 - d. There was no pit and no dungeon so dark that his faith could not light the way! There was no pit or dungeon so deep that his faith couldn't lift him up to higher ground!
 4. What was the secret to Joseph's incredible perseverance? He always kept his focus on God and he always centered his life around God! **(Gen 41:16, 25, 28, 32, 50-52)**
 - a. Regardless of what was taking place, Joseph always wanted to glorify God with his life
 - b. Why does Joseph speak God's name so often? He's in a society & circumstances where the name of God is not spoken. Others needed to hear God's name, but so did he!
 - c. He focuses so much on Jehovah that he focuses less on his circumstances! His focus keeps him aware that God is with him & in control! He centers his life around doing God's will & knows he can do God's will wherever he's at & regardless of what happens!
 5. These are bones we need to carry with us today as we are pressing on toward the promised land of rest! There are going to be difficult times in our lives, we need perseverance of faith!
 - a. Remember this from Joseph's life: The fact that a person is going through trying times or facing great opposition is not an indicator that the Lord is not with them!
 - b. We will face circumstances that will try our faith & perseverance – We can either allow them to conquer us or we can conquer our circumstances! **(James 2:2-4)**
 - c. The key to our perseverance will be our focus on God **(I Pet 1:6-9)** → It reminds us that God is in control, that this world is not our home, our foremost goal is pleasing the Lord and pressing toward Heaven, that no situation is too difficult to endure
 - d. Perseverance comes as we seek a purpose and a goal greater than ourselves and our circumstances... as we realize that this world & its pursuits isn't what matters most!
 - e. Apply this to our political turmoil → What if Obama gets elected? What will things be like for us? Certainly we can imagine up many doom and gloom scenarios can't we – But regardless of who gets elected, that will not change my being a Christian! There may be difficulties, but we'll still live for God and God will still be with us! Persevere!

D. Finally, this box wasn't holding a bunch of old bones, it was a memorial of Joseph's great forgiveness:

1. From Joseph's childhood, he knew the struggles of strained family relationships: **(Gen 37:2-4ff)**
 - a. Jacob was "tricked" into marrying two wives, Rachel & Leah, who were sisters. This alone would've fueled animosity, but it's even worse because they're sisters
 - b. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, she was the one he wanted to marry in the first place, and showed her favoritism. This must've caused all sorts of problems!
 - c. Rachel only had two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and they were clearly Jacob's favorite sons... He showed Joseph special care and love above all the others.
 - d. Jacob gave Joseph a colorful coat which made his brothers more jealous and Joseph seems to have had no problem showing it off! He also seemed to be a tattler!
2. After this event, Joseph's brothers, being filled with resentment, jealousy, and anger, decided to rid themselves of Joseph by selling him into slavery! **(Gen 37:18ff)**
 - a. Joseph had two dreams one night, both of which showed his brothers bowing down to him
 - b. Joseph seems to waste no time telling them about his dreams... Can you see him running up wearing that coat of many colors? Can you see the brothers' frustration brewing?
 - c. He is there as they plan their actions – He knew they first wanted to kill him & when they decided to sell him into slavery he knew they planned to deceive his father into thinking he'd been killed! All the ingredients for deep seeded resentment are there!
3. Now, let's travel to the land of Egypt and fast forward to the time Joseph has been promoted by Pharaoh to second in command and Joseph is holding the power of life and death in his hands!
 - a. Because of his planning and the great famine that hit people from all over came to Egypt to buy food. Joseph was in charge of dealing out food to those who came to buy it!
 - b. This meant if you wanted to eat, you had to go see Joseph and you were at his mercy!
 - c. One day a group of brothers came up to purchase food. He figured out quickly who they were! Suddenly all his past, with all its pain, comes flashing back! **(Gen 42:7-9, 13)**
4. With all his brothers there Joseph responds with grace, not bitterness! **(Gen 43:33-34)**
 - a. When Joseph sent his brothers home the first time he sent them home with more grain than they bought & with all of their money – They deserved no grain, they deserved no money... they deserved punishment, but Joseph showed grace! **(Gen 42:5-8)**
 - b. With all his brothers gathered together he invites them to a feast in his house & sits them down at the table in order of their birth! His brothers were amazed! This was a 1 in 39,917,000 possibility! How could this Egyptian stranger know this about them?
 - c. He, a stranger, throws them a feast... Then unloads more food off his own table for them
5. After some events which showed Joseph his brother's had changed, he revealed himself in a moment of great forgiveness and reunion! **(Gen 45:1-5)**
 - a. Put yourself there – Feel the sorrow, feel the joy, feel fear, feel the exhaustion it all brings
 - b. After sending the Egyptians out of the room Joseph draws them close in a more intimate way & says, "I am Joseph" and forgives them... Those are the first words he'd spoken to them in Hebrew! He then extends complete and unconditional forgiveness!
 - c. Next, Joseph brings all his family to Egypt, gives them land, & blesses them with wealth!
 - d. Now, even though Joseph had forgiven his brothers, this forgiveness had to be reaffirmed in their hearts even years after the event. This shows us that sometimes forgiveness isn't only difficult to extend, but it is also very difficult to accept! **(Gen 50:17)**
5. Why was Joseph able to extend such forgiveness to his brothers? He focused God! **(Gen 50:19-21)**

- a. Those words, but God, change everything! He saw past their wrongs & saw what God did!
 - b. He was able to grant forgiveness because he was operating from a vertical perspective, not a horizontal perspective. While he doesn't deny that what they did was wrong, he was able to move past it by focusing on how God used it for immeasurable good!
 - c. God used it to save the lives of many! But notice what else God did... God brought faith, perseverance, purity, & forgiveness to Egypt! And God healed their relationship!
6. For a moment, let's join Israel in their procession to Canaan and carry Joseph's bones... Such an ability to forgive others is a quality of all us need to develop:
- a. We all know that forgiveness is often difficult to extend. In fact, we can relate to Peter's question concerning how often we should forgive others **(Matt 18:15-22)**
 - b. While the wounds hurt, we must keep the doors of forgiveness open! We must fight hard against the resentment that takes root in our hearts & maintain a love for their soul!
 - b. When you find forgiveness difficult to extend, remember to focus on the Lord and center your forgiveness around Him! There is where the strength will come! **(Col 3:12-13)**