

**Miracles from the New Testament**

*John 2:1-11; Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 5:1-11; John 4:46-54; Mark 8:28-36; John 5:1-8; Luke 8:43-48; Luke 7:1-10; Luke 13:10-17*

*Please note: The following daily readings allows you to study other passages that speak to the place of scripture in our lives. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper. This week we continue reading from the book of James.*

*This book is often misunderstood as emphasizing works over faith. Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century referred to James as the "epistle of straw." Luther believed that the focus of "salvation by faith" is lost in James as he teaches his reader about the importance of works as a person of faith in Christ.*

*James' message is for the person who has lost touch with the high call of Christ in their behavior. It is far more than an "epistle of straw." As the apostle Paul says, "By your fruit you shall be known." Likewise, James knows that our life with Christ begins in faith, and then leads to a new way to live.*

**Monday** – Read *James 3:1-12*. As James continues in his teaching, he reminds us that those who lead and teach are called to a higher standard of behavior. Further, he focuses on the use of our language. Using the tongue as a metaphor for our language, James reminds us that the tongue can be destructive in our Christian relationships. He states clearly that blessing and cursing can not come from the same mouth. Pay attention to the way you use your language today. Are you blessing others or cursing them? How easily does your conversation turn to gossip? Start with your family and move outward to intentionally bless someone today.

**Tuesday** – Read *James 3:13-18*. James offers a formula for discerning true wisdom. He refers to bitter envy and selfish ambition as that which has an earthly origin. On the other hand, wisdom from above is "pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits." Start your day by finding a place to create peace where there is discord. End your day by giving thanks for the wisdom and fruits that come from above.

**Wednesday** – Read *Isaiah 2:48* and the daily devotional from ***Transforming Lives, Transforming Africa***. This is one of the most quoted passages in Isaiah. Engraved on the wall facing the United Nations building in New York City, it reminds us that our God is one of peace and harmony. How can you bring peace and harmony to family, church and work? Find that person in your life that needs encouragement and a word of love.

**Thursday** – Read *Acts 20:35* and the daily devotional from ***Transforming Lives, Transforming Africa***. In our secular materialistic society we are bombarded with the message, "happy are those who receive." The way of Christ is contrary to the way of the world. It truly is more blessed to give than to receive. Have your children heard this message lately. Throughout the day make plans for giving yourself away. How can you spread this message to all those you love?

**Friday** – Read *Isaiah 43* and the daily devotional from ***Transforming Lives, Transforming Africa***. The prophet Isaiah is sharing the truth of looking to the future instead of the past. Our human nature is prone to remember our past. These memories can be positive and negative. Guilt, shame, anger, bitterness, disappointment, and such can paralyze and lock us in a joyless existence. Pray at the beginning and end of the day that God would take all the negative events and patterns of the past. Now look forward to the new and glorious thing God wants to do in you.

Have a great week!

See you next Sunday, February 24, for **Heroes: Jacob – Redemption**

## Chapter 3: Isaac - Miracles

February 17, 2008

(3rd in the series on *Heroes of Faith*)

Last week we looked at the story of Abraham's faith. Today we examine how God used Isaac, the son and heir of the Abraham promise. In the story of Isaac, we see how God is working to bring salvation to the world. The story of Isaac is more about what God is doing when the divine and human come into contact.

Again this week, we will attempt to tie this timeless lesson back to the New Testament and our understanding of Jesus as the Christ.

### **Genesis 21:1-7**

#### **Isaac**

Isaac is mentioned in the formula "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" 23 times in the Old Testament and 7 times in the New Testament. Otherwise Isaac is far less prominent than his father, Abraham, or his son, Jacob. In comparison with the towering Abraham, the complex Jacob, and the noble Joseph, the Isaac of the Old Testament story is weak both in character and in portrayal.

Why is Isaac important? Clearly, Isaac is the child of God's promise, a living sign of God's faithful and gracious dealing with Israel. In this regard, Isaac is the focus of God's action. In this story, we see not so much what Isaac is doing, as what God is doing through Isaac. We see the result of the divine-human contact. God is dependable, and God's people can trust Him. And more, God is faithful even when we are weak and vacillating. Isaac is a major channel through whom God works to show grace and interaction.

#### **Isaac – the Name**

The birth of Isaac is a miracle. His mother Sarah is known to be barren, well beyond the childbearing age (she is 90). Yet God has promised the 100-year plus Abraham descendants. The root of the name Isaac literally means "he laughs." Yet many want to play on the Hebrew translation to find meaning. Is it God who laughs? Is it Sarah who laughs in her old age that God would grant her a son? Is it the community who laughs that an old couple would bear a son? The name Isaac, like the great majority of Hebrew personal names, is a statement. The Hebrew word in its original form means, "may the divine smile on the child." And so God does smile on Isaac, the child of the promise. Yahweh is quoted in 26:3 during a famine, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you." His success is the natural and inevitable effect of the divine blessing, which he bore.

#### **The Sacrifice of Isaac**

The most well known part of the Isaac story is the sacrifice in the land of Moriah. The issue of faith and obedience dominates the whole story. It pictures father and son, journeying to the land of Moriah, intimately sharing the time together. As they walk together, each bearing the materials by which the father expects to offer up the life of his only beloved son. They share a deep faith. Both Abraham and Isaac trust God to provide. For his part Abraham, for his faithfulness, receives his son, a second time. We see a God who is faithful to His promise. In this intimate moment between father, son and God, we get a picture of God's working on our behalf. We can trust God in moments of deep despair and anxiety. As our human existence comes in contact with the divine purpose of God, the miracle of our true purpose comes into focus.

### **I Corinthians 1:18-31**

Those who have not experienced the holy presence of God do not understand the things of God. Paul states clearly that the things of God confound the wise. What is God doing in your life today that is new and fresh? Where do you see the miracles of God that will confound the wise?