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## Exhortation

# "By faith . . ."

## 7. Isaac (Heb. 11:20)

Jim Wood

**I**SAAC WAS OLD, and his sight was failing (Gen. 27:1), and he had a feeling that soon he would be "gathered unto his people" (35:29). It was time, he thought, faithfully to discharge the duty of a father and confer the patriarchal blessings. Esau, the first-born, and thus normally the one to be blessed with the inheritance of family responsibilities, was called and plans made, somewhat secretly: "make me savoury meat . . . and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die" (27:4).

However, "Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau *his son*", and she contrived that the blessing should be received by "*her son* Jacob" (vv. 5,17). Disguised using "skins . . . upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck", and robed in "goodly raiment of . . . Esau" (vv. 16,15), Jacob presented himself before his father, "and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son? And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn . . . eat of my venison" (vv. 18,19).

Isaac was surprised: "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" (v. 20). Isaac's eyes could not make out the detail of the one who stood before him, but the sound of the voice in his ears caused his surprise to turn to suspicion: "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son" (v. 21). The occasion is an important one. Isaac does not want to make a mistake. He must give the correct blessing, as he sees it, to the right son, and he says: "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (v. 22). He must not allow himself to be deceived.

He applies one more test. He asks: "Art thou my very son Esau?". The answer, "I am", convinces him (v. 24), and there is one more confirmation as he kisses his son and "smelled the smell of his raiment" (v. 27). Unable to see, he collects what evidence he can and, in faith, proceeds, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

However, this is not the faith for which he is commended in Hebrews 11. It cannot be. It was God's will that Jacob receive the blessing, for "the elder shall serve the younger" was the declaration given to Rebekah (25:22,23). The Lord said: "I loved Jacob" (Mal. 1:2); but it is recorded: "Isaac loved Esau" (Gen. 25:28). So, rather than being an act of faith, is this secretive service of blessing more a blind, self-seeking rebellion? Whence then his faith in blessing Jacob and Esau (Heb. 11:20)?

When Isaac knew that Esau now stood before him he "trembled very exceedingly, and said . . . where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him?" (Gen. 27:33). When he realised he had been deceived, and that he had given the blessing which he wanted Esau to have to the wrong man, he did not curse. He did not try to recover the situation by withdrawing the blessing, but he said: "yea, and he shall be blessed" (v. 33).

Here is his faith. The blessing had been spoken and conferred. It must be the will of God. He would not rebel any longer. The blessing must stand. He called for Jacob, blessed him, and instructed him: "Arise, go to Padan-aram . . . And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham" (28:1-4). Here again is Isaac's faith "concerning things to come" (Heb. 11:20).

To most of us there will come times when what we have sought to accomplish for ourselves is frustrated, when steps taken to achieve what we want come to nought. It is faith that enables us to accept, without rancour or resentment, without indignation or impatience, God's response to our scheme, and move on "in full assurance of [that] faith" (10:22).