

God's Presence to Bless

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Date: 14 July 2019

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[0 : 00] And this is a good reminder for us today because we can fear all sorts of things, can't we? Whether it's hardship we are currently experiencing, or some sin we are caught in, or some opposition we are facing.

I mean, I only need to say the name Israel Folau and you know what I mean, regardless of what you think about his actions or not. But before we see how God is with us to bless us, let me show you from the Bible how he was with Isaac to bless him.

So at point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles. Now there was a famine in the land beside the previous famine in Abraham's time. And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerera.

Here our author draws our attention to Abraham who went to Egypt during his famine. And it seems Isaac is about to follow in his father's footsteps.

But when Isaac gets to the city or town of Gerera, God stops him. See verse two. The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, do not go down to Egypt.

[1 : 15] Live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while and I will be with you and will bless you. Despite the famine, Isaac is not to go to Egypt.

He has to stay in the land because God will be with him to bless him. But why is God going to bless him? Is it because Isaac deserved it? Well, no.

The rest of verse three tells us. He says, See, here we hear of Abraham's promises again, don't we?

You might even recognize similar language that God used when speaking to Abraham. He uses similar language to Isaac here. And last week I summarized them on the next slide with the acronym GLOB.

God has already kept the first one a great name for Abraham. He's since died. And God is now in the process of keeping the lob part. But what we didn't see last week was how later on in Genesis chapter 22, God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a boy.

[2 : 51] Do you remember that story? And Abraham trusted God so much so that he obeyed. Now, God, of course, stopped Abraham before he went through with it because it was just a test.

But because Abraham obeyed, then God swore an oath to guarantee those lob promises. The oath is on the next slide, and we'll just leave that up for a while.

I'm not going to read it all there. There's a bit of text, but that's where he swears the oath in Genesis 22. Now, of course, God was going to keep these promises to Abraham no matter what. But because Abraham obeyed, then God guaranteed them with an oath.

It's like putting a promise in writing. I promised my children the other week that they could have Subway for dinner, and one of them wanted me to put it in writing and sign it, the cheeky rotter.

But this is what God is doing here in Genesis 22. He's putting it in writing for Abraham. And this is also why here in 26, God will be with Isaac to bless him.

[3 : 56] Not because Isaac deserved it, but because God is determined to keep his oath to Abraham. And so God gives Isaac the same promises he gave to Abraham and adds that he will be with Isaac to bless him according to those promises.

And like father, like son, Isaac also obeys. Verse 6, so Isaac stayed in Guerrera. Children often take after their parents in all sorts of ways, sometimes in looks.

So on the next slide is Tom Hanks and his son Colin, the actor Tom Hanks. We're at the same age. We look very similar. Sometimes they take after father, son, take after each other in action.

So on the next slide is a father and son sleeping. Well, Isaac takes after his father Abraham in action too, both in good ways, verse 6, and unfortunately bad ways, verse 7.

See verse 7? Now when the men of that place asked Isaac about his wife, he said, she is my sister because he was afraid to say she is my wife.

[5 : 07] He thought the men of this place might kill me on account of Rebecca because she is beautiful. Now if you're experiencing a bit of deja vu at this point, you're not crazy because Isaac's father Abraham did exactly the same thing twice.

He lied to Pharaoh about his wife Sarah in chapter 12. And then he lied to Abimelech again about Sarah in chapter 20. It's the same Abimelech, I think, that Isaac lies to about his wife here.

Like father, like son. You see, despite Isaac just being told that God would be with him to bless him, his faith falters, doesn't it? And like his father, he's also found out.

Verse 8. Abimelech spots.

Isaac relating to Rebecca in a not-so-brotherly way and works out what's really going on. By the way, it seems as though Jacob and Esau at this point are not on the scene.

[6 : 36] They're not mentioned anywhere in the chapter. And it seems as though they're not even born yet because it would have been hard to pass Rebecca off as your sister when you've got two kids running around calling out mum and dad.

And so it seems this chapter is out of chronological order. We'll come back to that later. But notice Abimelech makes a law to protect Rebecca. It seems God has worked through Abimelech without the king realizing it to bless Isaac according to his promises.

The promise was descendants or offspring. So God used Abimelech to protect Isaac's marriage in order to keep his promise of offspring. And God often works through others for our good too, doesn't he?

God promises to provide for our needs and so often he'll work through others to do just that. Michelle and I were praying for a part-time job for her to help provide for our kids' schooling, which is not really a need.

It's a first-world kind of need, but it's not really a need. But in God's kindness, a job's just so happened to turn up at a place where someone from church, this congregation actually, used to work.

[7 : 48] And so this person from this congregation was able to give Michelle a few hints about how to handle the interview and she got the job. Or I've heard of others who were actually in need of medical appointments and it just so happened that someone canceled their appointment, someone they've never met before, and so the surgery rang them up and said, oh, we've got a spot for you, got a cancellation.

And they were able to get in just when they needed. I've heard of that a few times. These coincidences are perhaps better called God incidences because God is working through others without them realizing it and to bless according to his promises to us, just like Abimelech and Isaac.

Well, Isaac now seems to get that God is with him to bless him. For now he trusts God so much so that he even plants crops during a famine and drought.

So point to verse 12. Now a crop of a hundredfold was pretty rare, even in good times.

So to have it in a bad time was, well, a miracle. But that's the point, isn't it? God is with him to bless him according to his promise, this time the promise of land.

[9 : 22] Of course, seeing others prosper can make us envious, can't it? If we see someone's good health or marriage or wealth or whatever, we can wish that was us.

Or if you hear of someone winning lotto on TV, there might be a little bit of us going, oh, I think, I wish that was me. But of course, we justify our envy by saying, oh, that I would give some to the church.

Well, the Philistines don't even try to hide their envy. They simply kick Isaac out. Verse 16. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, move away from us. You have become too powerful for us.

And now, given that Isaac's just been told he's too powerful, he could have dug in his heels and stayed, couldn't he? But trusting in God to provide according to his promise of land, Isaac goes from the outskirts of the city into the valley, just where his father Abraham went, actually.

So verse 17. Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the valley of Gerera, where he settled. Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up or filled in after Abraham died.

[10 : 34] And he gave them the same names his father had given them. And so here, Isaac re-digs the wells, gives them the same name. It's again, like father, like son, we're meant to see.

But because of his great wealth, he needs more wells for his animals. Yet as soon as his servants find water, the Philistines come along and oppose him and effectively steal the well.

You see verse 19? Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herders of Gerera quarreled with those of Isaac and said, the water is ours.

So he named the well Essek, which means dispute, as your footnote says, because they disputed with him. Then they dug another well, God provided again, but they quarreled over that one also.

So he named it Sitna, which means opposition. He moved on from there and dug another well and no one quarreled over it. So he named it Rehoboth, which means room, saying, now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land.

[11 : 44] You see, Isaac continues to trust God to provide, doesn't he? He gets one well stolen, but that's okay. He continues to trust and moves on and gets another well stolen and continues to trust and moves on until finally there's a third well.

Isaac even points out that the Lord has given us. He knows who has provided it. And then Isaac goes to Beersheba, a place that Abraham also went to, again, like father, like son.

And it's here that God reassures him of his presence and blessing. So verse 23, from there he went up to Beersheba and that night in the place where Abraham was, the Lord appeared to him and said, I am the God of your father, Abraham.

Do not be afraid for I am with you. I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant, Abraham.

See, God reassures Isaac of his presence and blessing such that Isaac need not fear opposition. But notice again, God is with him to bless him.

[12 : 58] Why? Is it because he deserved it? No. Verse 24, for the sake of Abraham. God even starts off by saying, I am the God of your father, Abraham.

You see, we're meant to see that Isaac's blessing from God is not because he deserves it, but because God is determined to be faithful to the oath he swore to Abraham.

Isaac now seems to understand this because in verse 25, he builds an altar and worships God. And he continues to trust God because he sends his servants to dig for more water, trusting that God will provide.

And God does at just the right time. Verse 26, meanwhile, as the servants are off digging for the well, Abimelech had come to him from Gerra with Ahuzath, his personal advisor, and Phicol, the commander of his forces.

Isaac asked them, why have you come to me since you were hostile to me and sent me away? They answered, we saw clearly that the Lord was with you.

[14 : 06] So he said, there ought to be a sworn agreement between us, between you and us. Let us make a treaty with you that you will do us no harm just as we did not harm you but treated you well and sent you away peacefully.

And now you are blessed by the Lord. So Isaac then made a feast for them. They ate and drank and early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them away on their way and they went away peacefully.

That day Isaac's servants came and told them about the well they had dug. They said, we have found water. He called it Sheba. And to this day the name of the town has been called Beersheba.

Now I don't know if you noticed but Abimelech is quite the politician isn't he? In verse 27 Isaac says he was sent away with hostility but Abimelech kind of puts his own spin on it and says, oh no we sent you away peacefully.

Yeah right. But the thing to notice here is that we're told again that God is with Isaac to bless him. So much so that Abimelech no longer wants to oppose Isaac but be friends with Isaac.

[15 : 14] And what's more before the treaty Abimelech's people stole Isaac's wells but now there is a treaty which protects all future wells. And did you notice that no sooner is the treaty made in the morning that Isaac's servants return saying we've found water.

and in a time of drought and famine to boot. The point is God really is with Isaac to bless him. We're told this three times on the next slide is the three occasions throughout the chapter where the same language is repeated.

This is the theme of the chapter. But we're also told throughout the chapter that it's not because Isaac deserved it but because God is determined to keep his oath to Abraham.

And this is why Abraham gets so many references in this chapter. I mean first of all our author records all these events where you know it's like father like son. Isaac acts like Abraham.

And second the author mentions Abraham's lots of times even though it's Isaac's story. I mean in the remaining chapters of Genesis Abraham is mentioned less than once per chapter.

[16 : 31] Less than once per chapter. He's mentioned eight times in this chapter. And third we've seen God say twice that his presence and blessing for Isaac is because of Abraham.

Because of his servant Abraham. And this helps us to understand why the author has put this chapter out of order. I rather I remember Jacob and Esau were born last week but this week they don't exist.

It's out of order. And if this chapter wasn't in our Bibles we wouldn't realize it was missing. You know it would just go from Jacob and Esau quarreling and stealing birthrights last week to them quarreling again and stealing blessing next week.

It just flows seamlessly. So why does our author interrupt the Jacob and Esau story? Well again to show us why God bothers working with such rotten raw materials like Isaac's family?

I mean last week we saw Isaac and Rebecca show favoritism Jacob the heel grabber grabbing Esau's birthright and Esau the fool despising his birthright. And if you think that was bad wait until next week it gets worse.

[17 : 44] So why does God bother working with such a dysfunctional family? It's not because they deserve it it's by grace yes but it's also because of his faithfulness his oath to Abraham.

So what does all this though mean for us today? Point three some preachers would just jump straight from Isaac to us and go great it means God's going to make us rich he's going to be with us to bless us with riches of flocks and herds I don't think I want flocks and herds one rabbit is enough for me but we can't do that instead when we read the Old Testament we need to see how it's first fulfilled in Christ and the New Testament and as we do we see that God's determination to keep his promises to Abraham despite our rotten raw materials ends up with Christ so remember the promise in verse 4 to bless all nations through Abraham's offspring well we're the nations and Christ is the offspring so on the next slide we read from Galatians 3 the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his offspring scripture does not say and to offsprings meaning many people but and to your offspring meaning one person who is

Christ and as we heard in our second reading which is on the next slide as scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham here's the promise all nations will be blessed through you through your offspring who is Christ and so those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham you see because God was determined to keep his oath to Abraham that it ended up or resulted in him sending his son Jesus Abraham's offspring and Jesus went to the cross to pay for our sins for our rotten raw materials and we who have faith or trust in him can be blessed how well for starters with life eternal where we are right with God now and guaranteed of a glorious inheritance later I mean that's a pretty good blessing isn't it but it's only for those who trust in

Jesus and so do you do you trust in Jesus and for us who do then we have the blessing of God's spirit to live in us such that God is always with us to continue blessing us not with herds and flocks or wells of water but rather according to the promises he's given us remember God's presence to bless Isaac was according to the promises he gave Isaac of these lands over in the Middle East and that nation for example there was the promise of physical land so God was with him to bless him with physical water and possessions that he need not fear famine and God's promise to him was of offspring so God was with him to bless him that he need not fear his wife being taken even though he did fear that the point is God was with Isaac to bless him according to the promises he gave Isaac and so if we want to know how God is with us to bless us we need to look at what promises he has given to us you see

I remember doing a funeral for one of our members from this congregation Faye last year and in her room she had this plaque on the next slide which is entitled what God hath promised and it's a bit hard to read but it says God hath not promised sun without rain joy without sorrow peace without pain but God hath promised strength for the day light on the way help from above unfailing sympathy and undying love you see Faye knew what God did and did not promise her and so on the back of your outlines I've given you a whole stack and it's just a few actually from the Bible of promises that God does give us I said for starters if we believe in Jesus then we already have every spiritual blessing in Christ and you can read the rest of Ephesians 1 to see what they include or on the next one we've got the promise that nothing will separate us from the love of

[22:18] Christ and so we are more than conquerors through God who loves us or from Hebrews that we can approach God's throne and receive grace to help us in our time of need these promises mean God will be with us to bless us with help through hardship not save us from hardship but give us help through it so we need not fear during it I remember one of our members was told that an infection in her feet would mean she'd have to have her legs amputated I think it was from the knee down and needless to say she wasn't looking forward to that at all it was quite a shock but what helped her was knowing nothing would separate her from God's love it wasn't easy but she did say to me one time well God will still love me if I'm legless don't get me wrong as I said it wasn't easy for her but she needed to keep reminding herself of God's promises but

God was with her to bless her with his grace to help her through that hardship and as it turned out God answered her prayer and took her home to glory before the surgery or a couple of promises down to Philippians chapter four have a look at that one Philippians chapter four in the middle of the sheet there we got the promise of peace when we're anxious as a God is with us to bless us with peace knowing that we are right with him and that he is in control and so we need not fear whatever it is we're anxious about I know several people some of whom are here today who have handed over their anxiety and their worries about the surgery they're about to have to God in prayer and they told me that they had a real peace as they were heading in they didn't they weren't anxious they had a real peace and then they had the general anesthetic and they had really real peace but the point is God was with them to bless them according to that promise or take the promise from 2 Corinthians 4 the third last one on the page there that our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us eternal glory that far outweighs them all last year some good friends of ours the wife is in the mid 30s and she was diagnosed with leukemia in

God's kindness she's now in remission but at the time we're all praying that the treatment would work because it was pretty aggressive and she much preferred to stay with her husband and not miss out on life with her three kids but knowing that God was with her to bless her with glory to come where she would see them again and where whatever she missed out on this life would be nothing in comparison what she'd receive in the next it meant she did not fear but could keep trusting God you see God was with her to help her through that or even the second last promise there the promise that God will give us life after death so we need not fear death in fact another one of our members was almost passed away two weeks ago the medical staff called all the family in and I was called in as well she told me I'm ready to be with my Lord and I saw her again last week and she was actually a bit disappointed she didn't go for she knows

God's promise that God is with her to bless her with life after death or take the last one that Christ will be with us to the very end of the age and he will build his church so that not even the gates of Hades will overcome it and so we need not fear opposition from our world even though they take our freedoms like they took Isaac's wells God will still be with us to bless us with strength and opportunities to keep building his church and so just as I was determined or am determined to keep my promise to Megan which meant I'm with Ruby to bless her even with my heater or more importantly just as God was determined to keep his oath to Abraham and so he was with Isaac to bless him so God is determined to keep his promises to us which means he's with us to bless us according to those promises as our next hymn says since Jesus is with you do not be afraid since he is your Lord you need not be dismayed the Lord will be with you to help and to bless and to work for your good through your deepest distress let's pray gracious father we do thank you that you are determined to keep your promises and so help us to trust you and not fear knowing that you'll be with us to bless us according to them for we ask it in Jesus name amen thank you all thank you all thank you all thank you all my God thank you all thank you all thank you all thank you all that we're going to be thank you allô thank you all and then hitting that would be good other thank you all thank you all thank you all my God