

The Blessing Continues!

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[0 : 00] And then this is God's holy word to us. Please keep that page open. There's a lot going on. So let's get into it. Let's pray as we do that.

Father, we thank you that you have breathed out your word by your Holy Spirit. And Father, as we thought already, we rely upon him. Lord, we cannot understand your word or take it to heart or do anything with it but for your spirit.

So please, Lord, would he be with us? Would he speak to our hearts? And Lord, would he bring the things of Christ and give them to us, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, last Sunday, we picked up this next big block of Genesis, the family history of Abraham's son, Isaac.

But if you were here, perhaps you're wondering, hang on a minute. What's going on? Did I miss a week? Have we skipped a bit? Right? Last Sunday was all about the birth of Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau, and one day in their life that would follow them through their whole life.

[1 : 14] But this time, these brothers are nowhere to be seen. Now, if you're wondering where chapter 26 has come from, that's the first step towards understanding it. Right?

If you read the Bible at home, you've got loads of questions. That's a great thing. Right? It's when the Bible becomes kind of plain obvious and a bit boring to us. That's when we need to be worried.

We're not reading it properly. Genesis is skillfully written. It's full of suspense and intensity, cliffhangers. And we're supposed to ask, who's this?

And where are they going? And why are they there? Now, I'm convinced chapter 26 is doing that for us. It's drawing us into the story of God's promise in a way that sheds light on what we saw last time and what we'll see next time.

Last time, remember, chapter 25. History held its breath as Esau sold his inheritance to his brother Jacob for the price of a bowl of soup.

[2 : 19] And they effectively now have swapped lives. The blessing God promised their father Isaac was coming down to Esau. But now, not Esau.

Instead, it's coming to Jacob. And next time in chapter 27, we'll see how that plays out. Jacob and Esau actually swap places so that Jacob gets the blessing and Esau comes second.

So understand, in the story, everything hangs, doesn't it? Everything on God's promised blessing coming down through the family from Abraham to Isaac.

And now to these boys. The big question is, who's going to get the blessing? So what's chapter 26 doing? God confirms his promises and gives his blessing to Isaac.

God indeed passes his promises down through the generations, ready to be inherited by one of these boys.

[3 : 27] Some writers think chapter 26 is a sort of flashback, maybe to a time before Jacob and Esau were born. It might be. They're certainly missing. But whenever it happened, the reason it's here is to remind us that what God has promised, he will do.

And to confirm that his blessing is coming down the line to these boys. And the point for us, spoiler alert, is to see that despite the failures of God's family, which we see here, and indeed we see in our own lives, we can trust our faithful God to give us his blessing through his promised son, Jesus Christ.

How do we see that? Well, let's see first, God's faithfulness in the light of our selfish sinning. Selfish sinning, verse 7, Isaac and Rebekah, they go away to stay in Gerah, and when the men of that place asked Isaac about his wife, he said, she is my sister, because he was afraid to say she's my wife.

He thought the men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah because she is beautiful. Now, can you imagine that conversation? Darling, you're so beautiful.

Men turn their heads when you walk past. In fact, you're such a stunner that I'm worried that the people here might kill me in order to take you. So, I hope you don't.

[4 : 58] I told them that you're my sister, okay, so that I stay safe. Now, just go along with it, and we'll all be all right. Now, I'm not sure how he gets away with it, right?

Rebekah seems to go along with it. For a long time, they lived there, under that lie. It's all good. Except, if that conversation sounds weirdly familiar, it's because it's exactly the same conversation that Isaac's dad, Abraham, had with his mom, Sarah, when they went to a foreign country, not once, but twice.

Right? In Genesis chapter 12 and chapter 20, you can find the same deceit. And both times, it did not go down well with the people who lived in the land.

Both times, the king of the land finds out and says to Abraham, what have you done to us? Right? The people, they're horrified at the thought that they might have slept with someone else's wife and not known.

And they're horrified that actually it's her husband who's lied to them about it. One of the pagan kings who Abraham lies to says, how have I wronged you?

[6 : 13] What have I possibly done to you that you've brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You've done things to me that should not be done. And you know, the cherry on the cake is that the guy who said that is this same king, Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerah.

So first Abraham and now Isaac have both lied to the same pagan king about their wives, pretending that they were available when in fact, they're married women.

And both times, it's because they assume wrongly that the Philistines are the type of people who are going to kill you to steal your wife. We said this is the story.

Genesis is a book, a story all about a family. Well, do you know, this is a family where the men have a history of putting their own wives on the market to save their own skins from their own paranoid fears.

I was trying to think of a comparison to illustrate this. There just isn't any. There just isn't. Now Isaac is behaving, isn't he, incredibly selfishly. There's only one winner and it's not his wife, Rebecca, and it's not the king, Abimelech.

[7 : 35] And so for the third time in this book, we read words to this effect, verse 9, Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, she really is your wife. Why did you say she's my sister?

And all Isaac can say is, because I thought I might lose my life on account of her. Now I trust, brothers and sisters, that you haven't quite pulled this trick on holiday.

But that doesn't mean, does it, that we are above acting in our own self-interest without worrying or thinking about what it's going to cost other people.

It might be that you go through life or perhaps certain situations assuming the worst of someone and therefore treating them in a rude or prickly or defensive way when in fact they mean you no harm and it's just something that you've worked up in your own mind.

It might be that you go through life choosing to do your own thing, just whatever suits you, without thinking about what others need or what they benefit from and leave them to pick up the pieces after you.

[8 : 50] It might be that you do betray your wife, your husband, people close to you in your heart, your desires, coveting what isn't yours or in your speech, gossip in a way that hurts and lying to cover it up.

The straightest line actually from Isaac to us is perhaps the most surprising. Letting people crack on with sin and not doing anything to try and stop them.

Remember, this family was meant to bring God's blessing to the nations instead of bringing blessing. What does the king say? You've brought guilt on us. You were happy for us to offend God because it made your life easier.

Now, none of those are direct parallels with what Isaac did, but they all grow, don't they, from that same seed of selfishness. A heart that chooses to put me number one first and everyone else comes second.

I'll serve me and you pick up the tab. It goes without saying, doesn't it? That is completely out of step with God's heart and his plan. That's not unique to Isaac and God's family, but isn't that just the point?

[10 : 16] Right? That's just how the rest of the world works. Genesis tells us that Philistines in verse 14, they're so jealous of Isaac's bank account, they selfishly start to sabotage his business, blocking up wells so he can't get water for his animals and servants.

But that's not how God's family operates in the world, is it? That's not how you learned Christ. And yet, it is so often, isn't it, how our hearts operate and therefore how we choose to live and relate to people, isn't it?

Just like everyone else. Protecting my own interests at other people's expense. So if that's who we are, if that's who God's family is, how can God's promised blessing come to us?

Well, let's see in our second point, abundant blessing. Just have a look at verse 12. Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold because the Lord blessed him.

The man became rich and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. Wealth and success aren't always indicators of God's blessing. In the Old Testament, they often are and helpfully, Genesis tells us, doesn't it, that this is because the Lord blessed him.

[11 : 40] He has God's favor. And we've seen already it's not because Isaac's a really good guy. He's impressed the Lord with his godly living, anything like that.

So why does the Lord bless him? Well, we see because of his promise to bless this family and because of the way Isaac's dad, Abraham, responded to that promise.

And so just go back with me to verse 2. The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, stay here, I will be with you and bless you. For to you and your descendants, I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father, Abraham.

God keeps his promises. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and give them all these lands and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him.

Now we're probably okay up to verse 4, especially if you were here last week, remember the three M's of God's promise to Abraham?

[12 : 52] Right? No excuses this time. Do you remember? God promises to multiply him, grow his family more than the stars in the sky. God promises to magnify him.

all these lands, you will rule over these people, be kings over the nations and God promises he will be a mediator through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.

Now those are just cut and pasted out of chapter 12. God made those promises to Abraham but now the Lord's confirming his promise is true for Isaac. He will bless Abraham's family down the generations and so God's blessing then doesn't depend on whether or not we deserve it.

It depends on God being true to his word. But verse 5 throws a bit of a curveball doesn't it? God says he'll keep his promises because Abraham obeyed me.

Now if you were here for that series or you've read Genesis you might be thinking did he? I can think of a few times he didn't right?

[14 : 07] We've actually seen it already two times that he lied to people about his wife being his sister. Right? That's not on is it? However Abraham did grow in faith and obedience to the point where in chapter 22 the Lord commanded him with no context at all to take his son Isaac right?

The son God had promised to him and who he had waited all of 25 years to be born up a mountain to sacrifice him on an altar. And for all of Abraham's lack of faith in the past he unquestionably did it.

He obeyed by faith. when Isaac asked him going up the mountain where is the sacrifice? He replied the Lord will provide a sacrifice for himself.

The book of Hebrews even says Abraham trusted that even if he went through with it and he sacrificed Isaac the Lord could even raise the dead and give him his son back alive again.

And so he did it he obeyed. And you might think kind of narrowing Abraham's obedience down to that one thing is grasping at straws a little bit but Genesis makes clear that that was a special graded test.

[15 : 36] I swear by myself declares the Lord that because you have done this and have not withheld your son your only son I will surely bless you through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because he says you have obeyed me.

So when Genesis says in our passage that Abraham obeyed God I don't think he's talking about the overall suite of his life he can't be but I think that one ultimate test which after many failures to trust and obey Abraham passed with distinction.

Why does that matter? Because it means that Abraham is blessed on the basis of Abraham's one act of obedience.

It's a reminder for us brothers and sisters that for us to be right with God for him to smile on us give us his blessing doesn't depend on us getting it right all the time.

Isaac's sin in this chapter is embarrassing isn't it? It's embarrassing he should know much better than that and perhaps there are things in your life like that that you would wish for the ground to open up and swallow you rather than for anyone to find out about but we can be blessed by God because somebody else has obeyed where we haven't.

[17 : 06] Abraham is only a placeholder in the story his obedience was imperfect but when the offspring singular who God promises in verse 4 came to bless all the nations Abraham's great great great great great great grandson Jesus then God's blessing comes to us through him.

Friends about Jesus God can say with no conditions and no caveats that he will bless us as his family because Jesus obeyed me and did everything I required him keeping my commands my decrees and my instructions understand today friends if your trust is in him that Jesus perfect life and record covers our stained and sinful record so that we receive what he deserves to be right with God and at peace with him and be blessed by him Isaac receives what God promised then on the back of the mediator's obedience he got greatness success land that's the thing about the wells notice they're even digging up wells that Abraham had dug and giving them the names Abraham had gave them now if you've got you've got water you've got a foothold in a dry place if you name the water you're claiming ownership over it so God begins to magnify him giving him a place in this land and in verse 22

Luke Isaac says now we will flourish in the land more literally he says now we will be fruitful in the land words that take us right back to the beginning God blessed them and said be fruitful and multiply so God's blessing with God's blessing Isaac now expects that the next piece of the promise will fall into place more descendants than there are stars in the sky God will multiply him and friends we receive those promised blessings too on the back of Jesus' record God promises us a future land where we will live one day where there is no more crying and no more dying where God will be with us as our God and we will be his people and God promises to grow his family to build his church all over the world if your trust is in Christ you're part of it today and neither of those blessings come to us because we've done enough to earn it or we've balanced out our sins with good deeds but because Jesus has earned it for us by his one act of obedience by giving himself as a sacrifice for us if you read

Genesis 12 and 13 sometime and then you come back to Genesis 26 you'll see that actually they both follow exactly the same storyline Isaac's life is being poured into the mold of his father's life so that for better or worse he comes out looking the same and there is a sense then that they are united before God as one now brothers and sisters we are united with Jesus in that way we have been poured into the mold of Jesus life so that we come out looking the same so that he sees us God sees us today in Christ not as the same stained and sinful creatures we were when we went in but the same as his spotless sinless son because the moment we put our trust in him we became one with him so that now

God deals with us as one with Christ in the same way he deals with us in the same way that he deals with his perfect only obedient son and friends that is how we inherit his blessing by trusting in Jesus worthiness to receive it and putting our faith in him to take our rightful curse on the cross so that we get his rightful blessing God promises that all who believe in his son will not die forever but have eternal life so this morning if you're in any doubt about whether God will keep his promises for you perhaps you wonder am I really saved or will there really be a new creation where there's no more crying and no more dying will God really grow his church will those things actually happen are they true look at

[22:17] Jesus and see friends that God can't not keep his promises promises to his faithful and obedient son look at yourself and you'll say he can't he couldn't possibly he couldn't possibly give me these things look at Jesus and you'll say he has to and he has trust in him and all his blessings become yours freely and simply through faith in him God is faithful to his promises even in light of our selfish sin because his abundant blessing comes to us through his promised son Jesus Christ but as we finish there's one more thing we need to see here the alert among you will have noticed only reeled off two m's earlier magnify and multiply what about being a mediator well the final piece of the promise that falls into place here is finally international overflow almost the whole chapter right Isaac and the people in the land have been falling out there's blame on both sides but all that time

God has been blessing Isaac and so verse 26 Abimelech comes on state business with his special advisor and his defense secretary Isaac gives them quite a frosty reception but they say verse 28 we saw clearly that God was with you so we said there ought to be a sworn agreement between us and you now you're you're blessed by the Lord or as the ESV puts it now you are the blessed of the Lord we want peace with you so it's beyond doubt isn't it the Lord is with Isaac and is heaping blessing on him and so these guys they say if we can't beat him we might as well join him they've sent him away and he's only got stronger under the Lord's hand so now they're back to see if he'll sign a peace agreement with them now we're not told what Isaac thought but he does go through with it they eat and drink they sign the papers

Abimelech and his guys leave peacefully now it's not much I'll grant I'll grant but it is the beginning of a better relationship between God's family and the people who live in the land at the start of the chapter they can't stop fighting by the end they're living in peace or shalom wholeness completeness fullness things are the way they should be again between them which hints doesn't it towards God's plan to give his blessing not only to his family but through them to the whole world we've thought about the way that our own hearts are often so like the people around us who don't know the Lord the good news of the gospel from Genesis to Revelation is that the answer to that problem isn't just for churchy people people who grew up in a

Christian family or went to Sunday school when they were little God's peace and blessing are held out to all people through Jesus we all have the same problem and God holds out the same solution to everyone even when God's family isn't that keen like Isaac wasn't to be at peace with the other people where he lived God relentlessly and unstoppably goes after the people that Isaac has sinned against and turned away from and argued with to bless them so brothers and sisters as we go let me encourage you not to cut God's plan short and say you will settle for a new creation and a good church Lord thanks for that because he won't settle until every family and nation on earth have those same blessings too so family of God let's be about blessing people outside the church with the good news of Christ these verses remind us don't they that a precondition of that blessing is often to have a relationship at all with people outside the church and being on good terms with people

I hope you don't need to sign a peace treaty with your neighbors or your colleagues but it might take reaching out to say I hope everything's okay with us I'm so sorry if I've ever done something to offend you come over let's get a coffee let's start again shall we maybe it's reaching out for the first time the Lord does bless that Isaac's servants start digging a well in verse 25 they find water in verse 32 in between international overflow blessing to the nations it's no coincidence the well is called well of the oath or Beersheba because the name is a recognition of God's blessing in light of that new relationship the peace that exists the treaty that was signed perhaps this morning you're one of those neighbors or colleagues or friends and visitors this morning who isn't yet a

[27 : 44] Christian not yet part of God's family through faith and you're wondering what's here for you well friends it's as simple as this God offers you the same as he offers any of us there is no difference at all between you and anyone else here apart from that some have put their trust in God's promise and others haven't and so if that's you and you haven't yet this morning let me invite you to do that to put your trust in God to keep his promises for you not because of you but because of Jesus to give you peace with himself and you right relationship with him to make you part of his family the church to bring you home into a new creation at the end of time to live with him with no more sin no more jealousy no more lies peace in a world that is good and right and true forever God holds all of that out to you today whoever you are whatever brought you here without you having to do anything to earn it because friends

Jesus has earned it all for you through his perfect life his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead so let me invite you to take hold of that promise for yourself in Jesus today and by trusting in him to be blessed by God for all his goodness and faithfulness let's pray for that together shall we let's pray gracious father you are the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob Lord you are the same yesterday today and forever true to your word faithful to bless those who are undeserving Lord we see so much sin in our own hearts and lives but Lord we look to Christ and we see your promises are true and we claim them through faith in him and father I pray for any here who as yet have not turned to Jesus and taken hold of him by faith and Lord would you grant them the faith to do that today

Lord we can't be blessed by you apart from him and Lord we want that so much for people in our lives so Lord grant it we pray Lord even now to take hold of Jesus and have your blessing in him for this we ask in his name amen