

Rev. Ewen Matheson - Isaac at Beersheba

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Preacher: Rev. Ewen Matheson

[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's blessings for a few moments, let's turn together to Genesis chapter 26 that we just read and read again verses 23 to 25. Genesis chapter 26 at verse 23.

From there he went up to Beersheba, and the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, I am the God of Abraham, your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and will multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake.

So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

I'm going to give some time to these verses here, and especially in summary what we have in verse 24. The Lord appeared to him, that's Isaac, the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham, your father. Fear not.

And our attention this evening focused on this meeting and this revelation of the Lord to Isaac and into this place of Beersheba.

[1 : 20] Beersheba. And all of these different elements are familiar to us in their own regard. Beersheba, the place itself, has already been brought to us in significance in previous chapters.

But now it really comes into a place of prominence. And so too, Isaac, who is mentioned here to us and brought to our attention.

And Isaac, of course, is a very significant figure in the biblical history and as we go through the patriarchs in the line of Abraham and Jacob.

In the middle of that line, we have Isaac here. And we know so much about Abraham and we know so much about Jacob. And there is so much recorded for us in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, with regards to the father of Isaac and also his son, Jacob.

But comparatively little is recorded about Isaac himself. Even when we come to the narratives about him and the narratives around these chapters, that we find that even in his birth, the focus is more on his mother than on him.

[2 : 43] The focus is more on Sarah than Isaac. And so too, the chapter in which he is most familiar to us, in just a few chapters previous to this, in chapter 22, we have that great event of Abraham taking Isaac with the thoughts in his own mind that he is going to sacrifice him, to place him on an altar and to obey the Lord's call to sacrifice his son.

Even there, in everything that Isaac goes through, the focus of attention is on Abraham and how remarkable his faith is. And even after we have this too, we find when we come to terms with Rebecca marrying Isaac, even there in the quest to have a wife for the son of Abraham, the focus, again, is not on Isaac himself, the person Isaac, but on the effort that has been given, on the instruction of his father, on the quest of the servant, of the home of Rebecca and her response. And then following what we have here in chapter 26, the focus very much comes upon Jacob and the sons of Israel, that they take up the remainder of Genesis for us, and they take up a huge element of the narrative of Genesis.

But here in this chapter, our attention is brought to this man. Particularly here in this chapter, we have this focus upon him.

And what has been spoken here in verse 24 from God himself, bringing to view the place, the man, the revelation, and especially the promises of God to him.

[4 : 46] What he receives is a precious revelation, this moment with God, a moment that shapes him, affects him, and encourages him.

Fear not, for I am with you. I want us just to consider what we have before us here, just three brief points.

First of all, the arrival. The arrival at Beersheba by Isaac is recorded for us in verse 23, spoken of in a very simple manner.

From there, he went up to Beersheba, and from there, of course, speaks to us of everything that precedes. Isaac has been on a great journey. His life itself is a pilgrimage and a journey, following the example of his father, Abraham.

But what we have here in the background of his coming to Beersheba, that in chapter 25, we have recorded for us the death of Abraham. Verse 7, these are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years.

[5 : 55] Abraham breathed his last and died. In a good old age, an old man, full of years, and he was gathered to his people. And so, the focus is moving away from Abraham, who is a picture and a model to us and for us of an example of living a life of faith, committed to the Lord.

And of course, it's been spoken to us in Hebrews chapter 11 of that great picture of what faith looks like in the midst of this world, as a sojourner who waits for the city that is to come.

But now, there's a little focus on Isaac. And what we have in chapter 26 and verse 1, the chapter begins and is introduced to us with a famine, a famine in the land, a famine that was different to the famine of the days of Abraham.

And it is affecting all around, and it's affecting Isaac, in the sense of which there needs to be movement. There needs to be movement because of the famine. And the famine is a providence of God that brings a challenge to faith, that when things become dry and difficult and barren, when life becomes challenging and hard, our faith has been tried and tested.

And what we have in verse 1, 2, is immediately a reference to Abraham and the significant and dominant picture that Abraham gives to us in these narratives, even in reflection of Isaac's own experience, that there is an element of parallel here in many of the different parts of what is being followed in this journey as he moves to Beersheba, the parallel of the experience.

[7 : 41] Here is Isaac, and he is grown up with the model of life to him, his father. As a young boy and as a man, he looks up to his father, and he has the tremendous privilege of having parents of faith.

I wonder if you had that, or some of the children here, they have that. To have a mom and dad who are Christians, to have grown up with that great example of living life, seeing the things that are unseen.

Can you even begin to understand how much of a privilege that is to have believing parents?

Abraham became the example of faith, the example of faith, the example in how to live.

The Bible teaches the Christian that they need to train their children to instruct them and give them an example of the life of faith, and Abraham did that. Abraham does that for all of us.

He is the father of the household of faith in many regards. He is an example. And so, a good example is set, and it is set to be followed. But even with those who give the best example in life, nobody is perfect.

[9 : 10] And there are negative elements to Abraham's example, too, and unfortunately, they are followed by Isaac as well. We see that here in verses 6 onwards. And it's quite a solemn reminder to us, too, of the effects of our errors, that our failings, our shortcomings, our sins, have repercussions beyond ourselves, affect more than just us.

But how we come short affects other people, too. And sometimes when we've done something that is wrong, the bad example can be followed by other people, too.

And so, we need to be careful about our life, our conduct, and our influence. Here is the famine. Isaac, in verse 1, goes to Gerar.

And he is instructed by God, in verse 2, do not go down to Egypt. He's told not to go that far. He's instructed in his life to remain in the land of promise.

And it's quite interesting for us that he is the only one of the patriarchs who remains in the boundary of the promised land his entire life.

[10 : 29] Interesting, too, for us, too, when we think of Moses much later on, who is prohibited from entering the promised land. Here is Isaac, who spent his entire life there and gave himself there.

When we think of what he engages in in verses 7, and we see an exact parallel to what Abraham did, we wonder, and why did you do this, Isaac?

And he answers the question himself when he is speaking to Abimelech. And he says there in verse 9, I thought lest I die.

And he's declaring there he's scared. And as he is chided by this king, in verses 10 and 11, his deceit is exposed, but so, too, is his own insecurity, the fear that drives him. And it is a feature of Isaac's life, fear. From there, in verse 12, he goes into the land that he sows, and he has an abundant harvest, hundredfold.

[11:54] The Lord blessed him, verse 12 tells us. He sees in his own eyes and in his own experience the fruitfulness of this land, the land of promise, the land that was given in promise by God to Abraham, his father.

And then in verse 16, the king of the Philistines says, go away from us. They want him gone. And so in verse 17, Isaac goes down to the valley.

He goes deep into the valley. He moves because he is instructed by God to remain in this area and in this land. And so he is being chided by Abimelech and then he moves in verse 17.

And he continues in this displacement, experiencing the hostility and the envy of the people around him.

And he is here, this man who, as we view Isaac, we see him in the sensitivities of his own character and behavior.

[13:05] And we see him as somebody who doesn't instigate violence, but someone who is at the receiving end of it constantly and continually. We're reminded in Psalm 120, where the psalmist says in verse 6, too long I had made my dwelling among those who hate peace.

I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war. And this is the experience of which Isaac finds himself here, as he is sojourning in Gerar and in the valley of Gerar, that he wants peace.

He's frightened and scared. He doesn't want these hostilities, but everywhere he goes there is conflict. Here is a man of faith wanting peace, but the world around him doesn't give him peace. rather they show their inhospitability to him, their hostility in their behavior and conduct to him. And he grieves him.

And so then he moves, finally in verse 23, to Beersheba. And now the famine is over. And he returns safely to this place, a place that has been familiar in chapter 21.

[14:26] We have reference of Beersheba there, chapter 21 of Genesis, and then again in chapter 22 of Genesis, after Abraham has gone to take Isaac to sacrifice him, in verse 19, we're told that they return and go together to Beersheba, and Abraham lives in Beersheba.

And here is Isaac coming back to this place. And one of the places his father had settled, and it's at the most southerly part of the border of the land.

And there, amongst the Israelites, had become the same from Dan to Beersheba, from north to south. He is here in the land of promise.

And he is here in the midst of his providence. And in everything that he's gone through, whether he is there lying on the altar as his father lifts the weapon against him, or he is there moving from place to place, the hostility of the people of Gerar, the hostility of Abimelech, whatever he is going through, the overwhelming emotion we associate with Isaac is fear.

Fear. Now he's back home. And providence has been overruling in everything.

[15:53] He feared he was going to be hungry in the famine. He feared Abimelech. He feared the Philistines. And now he returns to this familiar place in verse 23.

Verse 24, after we have the arrival, secondly, we have appearance. The appearance of the Lord.

And as he returns in verse 24, the Lord appeared to him the same night. Immediately something happens. Immediately he receives a revelation and an experience that is going to change him.

And the language of what follows in verses 24 speaks to us of that affirmation of God's will and telling him to settle his mind that he is where he should be.

What an amazing thing to calm the mind of that conviction that you are where God wants you to be. And so God comes.

[17:08] And he speaks to him in that night and he reveals himself to Isaac. I am the God of Abram, your father.

He declares this message to him. This is the God who he knows of. The God who was there at the altar.

The God of his father. The God of every experience he has gone through in his entire life. The God who has been in every providence. The God who has always protected him.

The God who has always been there. The God who now reveals himself in this great and wonderful way. A deeper revelation of who he is to Isaac himself at that personal and real level.

I am the God of Abraham, your father. father. And what we find here is the sense of which Isaac is finding himself on holy ground.

[18 : 16] We are granted to him as this great revelation and meeting with God and the comprehension here in his own mind that he has been struck with awe with the greatness of who is revealing himself to him.

As he speaks of his identity his people are always affected and they are consciously changed when they meet with him.

I am the God of Abraham and then he says to him fear not. a message of assurance and help a message to this man Isaac in the midst of everything he has gone through that he is blessed that God has blessed him.

You see Isaac has spent his life fearing people fearing Ishmael Hagar fearing Abraham fearing Abimelech fearing the Philistines but that's not who he should be fearing he is called to have a holy fear and a comprehension and understanding of who God is and the greatness and magnificence of this God and what it means to have this God with you is able to disperse every fear of everyone else and everything else when God says fear not and where

God says I am with you I will bless you I will multiply your offspring for this for my servant Abraham's sake this is the covenant the covenant promises that where Abraham's are now Isaac's they belong to him in the line of this covenant and in the reality of the protection and care and blessing that God has for his people it has been evidence to him already in verse 12 he sowed in the land and it reaped a hundredfold the Lord blessed him he has evidence in his life that God is with him and he hasn't fully comprehended it he still lives in the fear of man until the day in Beersheba that he arrives in this place and on the same night God speaks to him and God reveals himself to him and God calls him to walk with him to walk with him

[21 : 25] God speaks to us and he calls us to an active positive response to live by faith not fear of man and to trust in the only one who helps I think sometimes that our courage fails us and we become scared of what people will think of us when by right the only one we should really fear and the only one who we should take full consideration of is God himself why is it we fear why is it we let our fears hold us back there is the arrival there is the appearance and thirdly there is the altar in verse 25 he built an altar there and called upon the name of the

Lord and pitched his tent there and there Isaac servants dug a well you see what the response of faith is in this meeting with God and in this revelation of the greatness of who God is and in his coming to hear the word of God speaking to him telling him not to fear the response of faith is worship he built an altar he built an altar so he could bow down to this God so he could worship this God so he!

reverence this God so he could glorify this God there needed to be a place to declare here that this is the God to be feared this is the God to be obeyed this is the God to be honored this is the God who is worthy and Jew of all my worship and so Isaac builds the altar there where he met with God he built that altar for himself and he built that altar as a place of worship for generations to market as a place of sacrifice to market as a place where God is honored for himself for his family for all the people and he marks this place and he marks Beersheba and he constructs this altar in this very place and we find there too how this is the sense of which we recognize the way that he has marked out this place as a place for all of these generations to encourage others to meet with the God that he has met with God blessed him here in this place he reaffirmed all his promises he gave him assurance in this moment and he thinks that this place is suitable suitable for all the generations suitable to be a place of which God is honored and God is worshipped in chapter 46 Israel Jacob Isaac's son he took his journey with all that he had and he came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac his son returns to the same place to offer worship to recognize here that this is the place of promise the place of the promise of the land the place of the promise of the walking with

God the place here in which he recognizes that God gives him peace his enemies may be against him but God transforms and changes all of this in verse 27 his enemies come up and they want to have a treaty of peace this reminds us of the verse we have in Proverbs chapter 16 verse 7 when a man's ways please the Lord he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him and that is what's going on here in verse 28 they want a covenant they want to have peace with the one who they had been so hostile to a treaty an oath and yet even in that we recognize here too that grief continues to be part of his life that even as he seeks to be faithful to

[26 : 30] God that there are still difficulties in his family in verses 34 and 35 Esau is turning away from the covenant blessing and his wives are those of the world and they make life bitter for Isaac and Rebecca here is the great difference in the contrast Isaac makes a treaty of peace but Esau wants to marry into the world he wants to be part of the world Isaac knows that he needs to be separate and distinct and faithful to God that the life of faith is a call to holiness where we ourselves are struck by the reality of who God is and so God blesses Isaac at verse 32 the same day Isaac servants came up and told him about the well and they said we have found water and so they called the place

Beersheba water comes after the Lord has revealed himself to him after he has made a treaty of peace water here is a symbol of life and fruitfulness of joy and blessing because he has given himself as a follower and worshipper of the Lord he knows these blessings as we come to consider somebody like Isaac I know that often we're taken up with those that are well known people of faith like Abraham and like even Jacob like Paul and Peter and they strike our imagination and there's so much information for us but we also ought to take note of the people of faith who give to us an example of a quiet and peaceable life in their outlook yes there are mistakes to learn from but what we have been taught especially is of

God's care and God's guidance and to come to follow the Lord by living by faith but we must do that by comprehending for ourselves who this God is I am the God of Abraham your father fear not I'm with you I will bless you revelation and reassurance this is who he walks with this is who he gives his life to this is who he follows and this is the great blessing and privilege of his entire life to know this God and to follow him amen the Lord bless our thoughts let's pray together gracious and most holy God we give thanks to you for your word and we pray that you would help us to live lives of faith to be committed fully and completely to you forgive us

Lord our doubts and fears and even our sins and shortcomings in all we ask is in Christ's name amen our concluding item of praise is on page 4 where we have!

Psalm! And we'll sing together verses 3 to 8 Know that the Lord has set apart the godly as his own the Lord will hear me when I call and my request make known in anger do not break God's law consider and be still present a righteous sacrifice and wait upon his will verse 8 I will lie down and sleep in peace my heart will rest secure for you alone O gracious Lord will keep me safe and sure let's stand to sing these words and then close with the benediction know that know that the Lord has set apart the godly just his own the Lord the Lord will hear me when I call and my request make known in anger did not break

[31 : 37] God's law consider and be still present a righteous sacrifice and wait upon his will O who can show us any good I hear so many say O Lord shine on us with your light show us your face

I pray you filled my heart with greater joy that others may have found as they rejoiced at harvest time when grain and wine you found I will light down asleep in peace my heart will rest secure for you alone

O gracious heart will keep me safe and sure now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good that you may do his will working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever amen