

Genesis Ch26v1-33 - Relentlessly Faithful

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[0:00] One, Genesis chapter 26, right at the beginning of the Bible. Now as I read, we're going to read all of chapter 26.

As I do, I want you to think a little bit with me. You know we've been looking at the life of Abraham from Genesis 12 through to chapter 25.

Just think about all that you learnt about Abraham. And as we read chapter 26, I want you to compare and contrast the life of Abraham and Isaac.

So see if you can see any differences between the two. And see if you can spot anything similar or the same experiences that they went through.

So as I read, try and do a bit of comparing, contrasting work. Let's read chapter 26, starting at verse 1. Now there was a famine in the land.

[1:22] Besides the previous famine in Abraham's time. And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar. The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, Do not go down to Egypt.

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. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.

I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will 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 keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions. So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, She is my sister. Because he was afraid to say, She is my wife.

[2:30] He thought, The men of this place will kill me on account of Rebekah because she is beautiful. When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah.

So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, She is really your wife. Why did you say she is my sister?

Isaac answered him, Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her. Then Abimelech said, What is this you have done to us?

One of the men might have slept with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us. So Abimelech gave orders to all the people, Anyone who harms this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

Isaac planted crops in that land and in 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.

[3:38] He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth.

Then Abimelech said to Isaac, Move away from us. You have become too powerful for us. So Isaac moved away from there and camped in the valley of Gerar where he settled.

Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham had died and gave them the same names his father had given them.

Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with those of Isaac and said, The water is ours.

So he named the well Essek because they disputed with him. Then they dug another well but they quarrelled over that one also.

[4 : 49] So he named it Sitna. He moved on from there and dug another well and no one quarrelled over it. He named it Rehoboth saying, Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land.

From there he went to Beersheba. That night the Lord appeared to him and said, I am the Lord God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid for I am with you and I will bless you, will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.

Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent and there his servants dug a well. Meanwhile, Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzah, his personal advisor and Fickle, the commander of the 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.

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

[6 : 21] And now you are blessed by the Lord. Well, Isaac then made a feast for them and they ate and drank. Early in the next morning, the men swore an oath to each other.

Then Isaac sent them on their way and they went away peacefully. That day Isaac's servants came and told them about the well they had dug and they said, We found water.

He called it Sheba. And to this day, the name of the town has been Beersheba. Well, let's pray and ask for God's blessing to us as we think about this scripture.

Father, thank you. Thank you for this ancient account of the life of Isaac and his relationship with you.

And we pray that as we look at it together, we would encounter the same living God who continues to bless his people.

[7 : 38] Father, we do not want to go out of this building being the same as what we came into it. But we want to leave encouraged, filled with confidence in our trust in you, changed in how we live our lives, living for your glory.

So help us now by the power of your Holy Spirit, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, how did you get on in your compare and contrast?

It sounds a bit like kind of class time again, doesn't it? What was the difference and what was the same about the life of Isaac and Abraham? Well, the only real difference is their names.

One was called Abraham and one was called Isaac. Yes, they had wives and their wives' names were different too, but the rest is virtually the same.

That's what we're to see in chapter 26. Isaac's experience is the same as Abraham's experience.

[8 : 59] And to help you, I've got a little chart on the screen that you can follow along. This is what we're to see, that they were the same. They had the same experiences.

Look at verse 1. Now there was a famine in the land beside the previous famine in Abraham's time. So they both faced the same crisis.

No food and no water. In fact, we'll discover as we go through the account that Isaac also faces the same fears. He's afraid his wife will be taken and he will be killed.

So he pretends that Rebecca is his sister. The exact same thing as his father had done. And they also face the same opposition as locals fight over access to water and to wells.

And Isaac, just like Abraham, makes an agreement with the surrounding nations. So it seems that there is a pattern to life.

[10:04] A pattern that can be common to us all. You see, we might live in different times and different places, but there's a familiarity to life. We all face different crises.

We all have different kinds of fears. We all have opposition. But that's not all. The main comparison between Abraham and Isaac is God's faithfulness.

God was faithful to Abraham and God is faithful to Isaac. In the familiarity of life, God is relentlessly faithful.

You see, generations may come and go, but God remains the same. He is consistently and persistently faithful. He's loyal and dependable.

You can count on this God. He's not going to let you down. He is the same God yesterday, today, and forever.

[11:10] So in the familiarity of life, let's see how God is relentlessly faithful. four things we're going to look at.

Here's the first one. Whoops, how did that happen? Well, there you've got them all at once. No surprises. So what's the crisis as we remember God's promise in a crisis?

What's the crisis? Well, it's there in verse 1, isn't there? Now there was a famine in the land. Now we might deface famine ourselves, but back in our history, in the nation of Ireland, there was a terrible famine.

Thousands died and over a million people travelled to the US in search of a better life. It's a normal and understandable response. When you haven't got food, you move out to go find it somewhere else.

And that's exactly what Isaac did. Look at the rest of verse 1. He went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. But it seems this was just a stop-off point.

[12:17] Isaac had plans to take his family down to Egypt where food grew in abundance and water flowed freely. Now while understandable to go down to Egypt, going down to Egypt was to walk away from God.

Look at verse 2. Look at the warning. The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, Do not go down to Egypt. Live in the land where I tell you to live.

You see, God had made the promise to Isaac's father Abraham that he would have a land for himself and for his people. So if they were to head off down to Egypt, it would be an act of disobedience.

Egypt might have solved an immediate problem. It would have put food in the belly. But it would create a deeper crisis in his relationship with God.

God faithfully reminds Isaac of his promises. That he is a faithful God. In fact, the same promises he had given to his father are now repeated personally to Isaac.

[13:29] Let's review them very quickly. Verse 3. God says, Stay in the land. I will be with you and I will bless you. God promises to be present with his people.

The rest of verse 3. Second promise for you, to you and your descendants, I will give all these lands. So God promises to be present and he promises to give them a place to live.

There's a third promise in verse 4. He says, I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. So God will be present, he gives them a place, and he promises them a big people.

They will be a great people. And then the end of verse 4, the last promise. And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.

Did you get the promise? God says, I am going to have a people and they will be in God's place, enjoying God's presence, who in turn are going to be a blessing to all the nations around them.

[14:45] This is the kind of God I am. I made that promise to Abraham and I'm keeping that promise and this promise is for you, Isaac. It's as if God is coming to Isaac personally and saying, I am your God to.

I'm not going to fail you, I'm not going to forget you in your crisis. I wonder what kind of crisis you are facing today.

Some change in your experience of life, a trouble, a concern. And sometimes the only option we can see, the only solution we can come up with is to do the Isaac thing and head for Egypt.

Turn away from God and trust our own direction. Well, the right response is always to obey God, even if it doesn't make sense to us.

So, end of verse 6, or verse 6, Isaac stayed in Gerar. He did what God had said. He settled down and he confronted his crisis head on with the promises of God ringing in his ears.

[16:03] And we need to hear that same promise today as we go through life, whatever crisis may come, listen to the promise, I will be with you, I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you.

I am the same yesterday, today, and forever. You see, in the familiarity of life, God is relentlessly faithful.

He does not forget his people. So, remembering God's promise in a crisis. Number two, seeing God's sovereignty in our fears.

As Isaac settles down in Gerar with his family, he faces another challenge. It seems that the kings in that place were known to take the wives of visitors and kill off the husbands.

So, Isaac comes up with an old family plan. He did exactly what his father had done. He told porkies, didn't he? Look at verse 7.

[17:12] When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, oh, she's my sister. because he was afraid to say, she is my wife. He thought the men of this place might kill me on account of Rebecca because she was beautiful.

I mean, that's what happens when men abuse their powers of position. They take as they please. So, naturally enough, Isaac is afraid for his life.

And we might think, well, wasn't that a clever plan on Isaac's part? No, don't be fooled by his plan. It's wrong on two counts.

First, it seems that he's quite happy to put his own wife in danger with all these other men to save his own bacon. Not very loving. It seems he's forgotten his wedding vows to protect and to cherish.

Second, he's just had a personal commitment from God who came to him and said, I will be with you and I will bless you. And as soon as the challenge comes, it seems he's forgotten that promise too.

[18:26] His fears are real, but his response to those fears are sinful. Rather than speak the truth about his wife, rather than trust God's promise, he does what he thinks is best for himself.

well, so far so good. It seems to be working, doesn't it? He's keeping his life. However, his plan is about to unravel.

Verse 8, when Isaac had been there a long time, so this has gone over years, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked down from the window, and what did he see?

Isaac caressing his wife, Rebecca. It seems Isaac and Rebecca's secret rendezvous had raised suspicion. That's not the way brothers and sisters behave with each other.

The game was up. Verse 9, so Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, she is really your wife. Why did you say she is my sister?

[19:33] His heart has been exposed. Isaac is a selfish, out for himself, I know better than God sort of guy. But what we need to see here is not just his sinful response to his fears.

What we're to see is God's sovereign care over his people despite their sin. Look at verse 11, so Abimelech gave orders to all the people, anyone who harms this man or his wife, shall be put to death.

The order could have been so different from the king. The king could command anything. He could have said, let's put Isaac to death and we'll take Rebecca.

But no, God in his sovereignty preserves and protects Isaac and Rebecca. in some ways it shouldn't happen but it does because this is the kind of God we have who is watching over his people.

Now don't you and I have our own fears? We might fear our spouse being taken by somebody in the town we visit. But don't we have fears about speaking the truth and declaring what we believe.

[20:59] Fearing how people will respond to us. Fears about trusting God to deliver on his promises. And like Isaac, ashamed to say it, we've not always responded rightly.

Instead of asking God to strengthen our faith and enable us to trust, well we've adopted the Isaac plan haven't we? We've told lies.

But to our astonishment as we look back over our life, we see God's sovereign hand of care upon us, watching out for us.

Of course, this doesn't mean it's a free pass to sin and go, it doesn't matter what I do, God's looking after me. No, but doesn't it amaze you? Aren't you amazed at how God watches over our life even when we make sinful choices and selfish decisions?

This is the kind of God we have who's faithful to his people. You see, in the familiarity of life, God is relentlessly faithful.

[22:14] Third, experiencing God's flourishing in the opposition. salvation. Well, despite Isaac's wobbles, God continues to bless.

This is the faithfulness of God. Verse 12, Isaac planted crops in the 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. Now, that's great for Isaac, but there's a problem when you become successful.

It breeds enemies. People don't like you anymore. The locals have had enough. Verse 14, he had so many flocks and herds, the servants from the Philistines envied him.

So all the wells that his father's servant had dug, well, they just filled them up with earth. A little bit of skull duggery was going on. The message was crystal clear.

[23:15] Isaac, pack your bags and get out of town. We don't want your sort round here. In fact, he got his marching orders from the king himself. Verse 16, Abimelech said, move away from us, you've become too powerful.

So Isaac moved away from the people. We would think that's the end of the situation, but it's not.

It seems the locals wouldn't let him settle. Wherever Isaac went, they followed as he began to dig wells for water. No sooner had he started than the protesters arrived.

No wells here. Down with Isaac. Save our planet, or whoever else happened to be there. In fact, the hostility was so severe, Isaac named the wells, we see this in verse 19 and 20, Essek and Sitna.

Or in English, we would say disruption and opposition. Now it's not like Isaac could just head off into town and buy some water himself.

[24:23] No, this was serious. The water supply had been cut off. No water, no life. What's he going to do? Well, he would do the thing that we would do in a desperate situation, dig another well.

Would it be different this time? Well, let's see, verse 22. He moved on from there and dug another well and no one quarreled over it.

He named it Rehoboth saying, now the Lord has given us room or given us space and we will flourish in the land.

You see, once again, we see the faithfulness of God at work in the life of Isaac. All the opposition, but yet God remains true. But God does even more than this.

He digs him out of an even bigger hole. You see, this is God being faithful to his plan. You see, there was a time when God's people were in God's place and they enjoyed God's presence.

[25:32] They were given all that they needed and more. All the food they wanted, all the water they wanted. In fact, they flourished in that land, didn't they? we know it as the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve were given those clear instructions to be fruitful and increase, to fill the earth and to subdue it. Man and woman together were to expand the borders of Eden so that humanity might flourish enjoying God and displaying his glory.

That was the plan. But enter the opposition, the serpent. Instead of flourishing, the man and woman failed.

Instead of displaying God's glory, they rebelled and took the glory. But despite all of the opposition, God remains faithful to his plan. Fast forward from the Garden of Eden to Isaac digging wells and we see something of God's faithfulness being worked out.

God's people in God's place, enjoying God's presence. They have been given room, they have been given space to flourish in the land just as God had said.

[26:49] You see, sometimes we see God's faithfulness up close and personal. Other times we need to take a bigger step back and see the bigger picture and see how God is stubbornly fulfilling his plan for the world because he will always have his people in his place, enjoying his presence so that they might flourish.

You see, in the familiarity of life, God is relentlessly faithful. people. Fourth, celebrating God's blessing in the nations.

So Isaac and his family continue to flourish. They live and enjoy God's presence. His blessing is being poured out upon them. But guess what?

God's blessing was never to be restricted to Isaac. God's promise was always to bless the nations. At first, it seems trouble is on the horizon.

This time, the heavy gang have arrived, verse 26. The protesters have gone home. Now the big guns have come out, verse 26. Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzah, his personal advisor, and fickle the commander of his forces.

[28:22] The military might are there. Isaac asked them, why have you come to me since you were hostile to me and sent me away? Are you looking for a fight?

What's going on here? But Abimelech hasn't come to fight. He's come to be blessed. Look at verse 28. They answered, we saw clearly that the Lord was with you.

End of verse 29. And now you are blessed by the Lord. Abimelech has been watching Isaac's life, and he's seen God's goodness and kindness to Isaac, and Abimelech wants a piece of the pie.

You see, God's people, when they're blessed, and when people look in and see the blessing of God upon them, they are also drawn to God. In Abimelech's case, he has a plan.

Let's read verse 28. He answered, we saw clearly that the Lord was with you, so we said, there ought to be a sworn agreement between us and you.

[29:34] Let us make a treaty with you. So promises are given one to each other, agreements are made, documents are signed.

Verse 30, Isaac then made a feast for them, they ate and drank. Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other, then Isaac sent them away, and they went peacefully.

It seems something of God's blessing has begun to rub off on Abimelech. He now leaves a blessed man. He now goes home peacefully.

Abimelech leaves having tasted something of God's goodness and kindness. Now this encounter mightn't seem much to us, but on reflection it is something huge to celebrate.

The nations are now beginning to be blessed through Isaac, through his family, as they come into contact with God's people. And what Abimelech has just experienced is a foretaste of the ultimate peace that we can have and that we can enjoy.

[30:51] You see, God had made these promises to Abraham, now he's made these promises to Isaac, that the nations of the world would be blessed through their family. Look back with me to verse 4.

Remember God's promise, the end of verse 4? God says, all nations on earth will be blessed.

Through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed. God is saying through their offspring, a seed would come, a son who would bring the blessing of peace to all nations.

The New Testament makes that clear to us. You can see the verse on the screen. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

Scripture does not say, and to seeds, meaning many people, but, and to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ.

[31:57] You see, the promise of blessing and peace is to be found in our relationship to Jesus Christ. You see, it's as we encounter Jesus, as we come to him, we find peace.

Through Jesus, through his death for our sins, we gain peace with God and we are filled with his peace. So when we face into our crisis, when we're overcome by fears, when we experience opposition, we can turn to one who fills us with peace and he sends us with his peace.

Abimelech saw in Isaac something of God's blessing and he was drawn to it. He sought it out.

He longed that he could know this God too. I wonder what it is as people look in at the community of Carigalline Baptist Church.

What do they see? Are they drawn? Are they attracted by what the people have? You see, as we run to Jesus, we are receiving that peace in our guilt and shame.

[33 : 17] We enjoy peace with one another as we forgive one another. We experience peace within our own lives as we pray it back to God and he fills us with peace.

We are a people who are flourishing under God's blessing. Through Jesus we have become a community of peace where the lost and the broken and the hurting are welcome and can come and meet the risen Lord Jesus for themselves.

The church becomes a refuge for the nations because the church, the people of Carigoline Baptist Church in this context, we are God's people in God's place, experiencing God's presence so that through the church the blessings of Christ might flow to the community around us.

You see in the familiarity of life God is relentlessly faithful. He doesn't give up.

He doesn't forget. He has made His promises and He has kept His promises throughout the generations and He is keeping His promise to us today. He is faithful and He will cause His people to flourish.

[34 : 44] We are blessed. Let's pray. Amen. Father God, we look back over our lives and we can see so much that is perhaps repeated, so much the same, the endless cycle of familiarity, the routine, but yet in every step that we take, in all that we do, you are constant.

You never change. You are persistently and consistently faithful. You are doing what you have promised.

You have caused a people to exist for your glory. help us that we might live out this life well, that we would become an attractive community as we share the peace of Christ with those around us.

Father, we long that by your Holy Spirit, the lost, the broken and the hurting will find a refuge and a place of peace amongst your people.

We pray for your Spirit to be at work and we ask it, Lord, for our good and for your glory alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[36 : 32] Amen. Well, we're going to sing together one hymn that summarises what we've been thinking about.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father. He is the faithful God. If you know this God, then I encourage you to sing it out to encourage those around you.

Let's stand together as we sing.