

God's Presence to Bless

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[0 : 00] Well, last week I introduced you to Ruby the Rabbit, the latest member of our family. For those who weren't here last week, this is the photo of her, this is Ruby.

And the latest in the Ruby saga is I've now lost my heater. Because there is fear that in the laundry, sorry, in her room, it's too cold.

So now she has my heater. Though I shouldn't complain because after I complained about her last week, a number of people very kindly offered me some recipes for rabbit stew.

I was very tempted to take them, but I'm determined to keep my promise to my daughter Megan about having a pet, which means I am to stick with Ruby and bless her, even if it costs me my heater.

Well, today we see that God is determined to keep his promise to Abraham, which means he's going to stick with Isaac to bless him, such that he need not fear, not the cold, but opposition.

[1 : 11] 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 opposition that we may soon be facing as Christians in our changing society.

I mean, I only need to say the name Israel Folau and you know what I mean, whether you agree with him 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 point one in your outlines, verse one in your Bibles. I know 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 Gerar. Now here in verse one, our author immediately draws our attention to Abraham and the famine that happened during his time.

And during his time, Abraham actually went down to Egypt. And so it seems Isaac is set to follow in his father's footsteps. But when Isaac gets to the city of Gerar, God stops him.

[2 : 23] You see verse two, the Lord appeared to Isaac, though, there 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.

You see, despite the famine, Isaac is not to go to Egypt, but he's to stay in this land. Why? Well, because God will be with him and bless him. But why will God bless him?

Is it because Isaac deserves it? Well, no. The rest of verse three to five tells us why. It says, for or because 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 or children, grandchildren, descendants, all nations on earth will be blessed because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, decrees and instructions.

And now here are the promises that God made to Abraham being repeated now to Isaac. We saw these promises last week. If you hear I summarize them on the next slide with the acronym glob.

[3 : 44] God had already kept the first one, a great name for Abraham. He's since passed away. And now he's in the process of keeping the next three through Abraham's son, Isaac.

But what we didn't see last week was how later on in Genesis 22, when Abraham was still alive, God actually told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

Do you remember that story? And Abraham trusted God so much so that he obeyed. Now, of course, God stopped Abraham before he went through with it. God doesn't want us to sacrifice our kids.

It was just a test. But because Abraham passed the test, because he obeyed, then God swore an oath to keep these promises. The oath from Genesis 22 is on the next slide.

I'm not going to read it all, but we'll leave it up there for a little while. Now, of course, God was going to keep these promises of land, offspring and blessing to all nations, no matter what. God keeps his promises.

[4 : 43] But because Abraham obeyed, then God guaranteed those promises with an oath. It's like when we want to guarantee a promise, we put it in writing, don't we?

The other week I promised our kids they could have Subway for dinner. And one of them wanted me to put it in writing and sign it, the little rotter. But that's what God did for Abraham in Genesis 22. He put it in writing with an oath. And this is why God now, back in our chapter, is with Isaac and will bless him. Not because Isaac deserves it, but because God is determined to keep his oath to Abraham.

Now, because of his oath, God gives these same promises now to Isaac and adds that he will be with Isaac and bless him according to these promises.

And like father, like son, Isaac obeys. Verse 6. So Isaac stayed, as he was told, in Gerer. Now, children often take after their parents in all sorts of ways, don't they?

[5 : 47] Sometimes it's in looks. So like on the next slide, Tom Hanks and his son Colin, they look pretty similar at the same age. Sometimes it's in action. So here's a father and son on the next slide, sleeping similarly.

Well, Isaac takes after his father in action too. Both good, verse 6, by obeying, but also bad, verse 7. Have a look at verse 7. Sentence 7.

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. He thought the men of this place might kill me on account of Rebecca, because she is beautiful.

Now, if you're having a moment of *deja vu*, then you're not going insane, because this is exactly what Isaac's father, Abraham, did to his wife twice.

So back in chapter 12, Abraham lied to Pharaoh about his wife and said, she was my sister. And then in chapter 20, Abraham also lied again to Abimelech.

[6 : 51] The same Abimelech, I think, that Isaac now lies to about his wife. It's like father, like son. And like father, like son, Isaac also is found out.

Verse 8. When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked down from the window and saw Isaac caressing his wife, Rebecca. So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, she's 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. There's a bit of a wuss here. Then Abimelech said, what is this you have done to us?

One of the men might well have slept with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us. Abimelech spots Isaac relating to Rebecca in a not so brotherly way and works out what's really going on.

By the way, I should point out that at this point, in fact, the whole chapter, there's no mention of Jacob and Esau. Did you realize that as Gillian was doing the reading? In fact, it doesn't seem they're even born yet.

[7 : 56] After all, it'd be really hard to convince people that your wife is your sister if your kids are running around calling you mum and dad, wouldn't it? It seems this chapter is actually out of chronological order.

I will come back to this later. But notice Abimelech makes a law to protect Rebecca. It seems God has worked through this king without the king realizing it to bless Isaac according to God's promises.

You see, God's promise was that he would increase their descendants. But they've got to kind of stay together and Rebecca not go off and sleep with other men for that to happen, don't they? And so God used Abimelech to protect Isaac's marriage and in order to keep his promise of descendants.

God often works through others for us like that, doesn't he? God promises to provide for our needs and he can often work through others to do that. My wife and I were praying for a part-time job for her to help with kids schooling and so on, which is not really a need.

That's a first world need. But in God's kindness, a job just so happened to come up at a place where someone from church used to work. And so this person from church was able to give her a few hints to help her in the interview and she got the job.

[9 : 10] Or I've heard of others who were actually in need of a medical appointment. It's hard to get into certain doctors these days. And they got rang up and said, oh, someone just happened to cancel their appointment.

You can have their spot. I've heard of that quite a few times, actually. These coincidences are perhaps better called God incidences because God is working through others without them realizing it to bless according to his promises.

So that's what we see happening here. Well, Isaac now seems to guess that God is with him to bless because he now trusts God instead of fearing.

In fact, he has so much faith that he even plants crops despite the famine and drought. So we're at point two in your outline, verse 12 in your Bible. Now, a crop of a hundredfold in good times is a pretty rare thing.

So to have a hundredfold crop 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 about the land.

[10 : 38] Of course, seeing others prosper can make us envious, can't it? You know, if we see someone's good health or marriage or wealth, we can wish that was us.

Or if we hear someone winning the lotto on TV, then sometimes there's just a little bit of us that thinks, I wish that was me. Of course, we justify the envy by saying, oh, but I would give some to the church and the poor, so it's OK.

The Philistines don't try and justify their envy or hide it. They just simply tell Isaac to get lost. Verse 16. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, move away from us.

You've become too powerful for us. Now, if Isaac is too powerful for them, then he could have just dug his heels in, couldn't he? And stayed.

But he didn't. He continued to trust God to provide according to his promises. And so Isaac moves from the outskirts of the city into the valley where his father Abraham once lived.

[11 : 40] Verse 17. Bottom of the page. So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the valley of Greer, 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 when Abraham died.

And he gave them the same names. Isaac re-digs the wells and gives them the same names. Again, it's like father, like son. And yet his wealth is so much that he needs more wells for his animals.

But as soon as he finds a well or his servants find a well, the Philistines come along, oppose him and steal it. So verse 19. Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there.

But the herders of Greer quarreled with those of Isaac and said, the water is ours. So he named the well Essek, which means dispute, because they disputed with him.

Then they dug another well, but quarreled over that one also. So he named it Sitna, which means opposition, as your footnote says. He moved on from there and dug another well and no one quarreled over it.

[12 : 52] He named it Rehoboth, which means room, saying, now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land. You see, time and time again, Isaac continues to trust God to provide, doesn't he?

Despite fearing the opposition or creating conflict, he continues to trust God to provide another well. And by the third time, he gets to keep it.

And you notice what Isaac said at the end of verse 22. The Lord has given us. He knows it's God's provision. And then Isaac goes to Beersheba, a place Abraham also went.

Again, it's like father, like son. See verse 23. From there, he went up to Beersheba. And that night the Lord appeared to him and said, I am the Lord, 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. And he God reassures Isaac of his presence and blessing such that Isaac need not fear any opposition.

[14 : 05] But do you notice again why God is with him to bless him? It's not because Isaac deserves it. You see verse 24 again?

It's for the sake of Abraham. God even starts off by saying, I am the God of your father, Abraham. You see, God is with Isaac to bless him, not because he deserves it, but because God is determined to keep his oath to Abraham.

And now Isaac seems to understand some of this, because in verse 25, he builds an altar and worships God. And he continues to have faith in God.

For Isaac then sends out his servants to dig for more water, trusting God to provide. And God does at just the right time. So verse 26.

While the servants are out digging for another well, meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar. And Ahuzath, his personal advisor, and Phukol, the commander of his forces.

[15:08] Isaac asked them, why have you come to me since you were hostile to me and sent me away? They answered. Notice the reversal now. Oh, 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 us no harm, just as we did no harm to you, but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully.

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

That day, after they just left, Isaac's servants came and told them about the well they had dug. They said, we've found water. He called it Sheba.

And to this day, the name of the town has been called Ber Sheba, which is the well of oath. Now, I don't know if you realize, but Abimelech is quite a politician, isn't he?

[16:07] In verse 27, Isaac says, you sent me away with hostility. And then Abimelech comes and puts his positive spin on it. Oh, I sent you away peacefully. Yeah, right. But notice the thing here is that we're again told that God is with Isaac to bless.

This time from Abimelech's lips. So much so that Abimelech no longer wants to oppose Isaac, but be friends with Isaac. And what's more, before the treaty, Abimelech's people stole Isaac's wells. But now there is a treaty that protects all future wells. And no sooner as this treaty is made, the servants turn up and say, we've got another well.

We've just found water. The point is, God really is with Isaac to bless him, isn't he? On the next slide, we're told this three times throughout our chapter, that God is with him to bless him.

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

[17:20] And this is why Abraham gets so many references in the chapter. I mean, first of all, our author records all these father-like son events to kind of point back to Abraham.

And then second, the author mentions Abraham's name lots of times. It was six times in our reading, plus another two. Do you realize in the rest of Genesis, his name gets mentioned less than once per chapter?

It's eight times in this chapter. And twice we've already been told that God's presence and blessing for Isaac is because he's determined to keep his oath to Abraham.

This also helps us to understand why the author has put this chapter out of order. 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 the Bible, we wouldn't notice it was missing, actually. We just go from Jacob and Esau last week back to Jacob and Esau next week. And it just kind of runs seamlessly. So why does our author interrupt that Jacob and Esau story with this chapter today?

[18:29] Well, again, to show us why God bothers working with such rotten, raw materials as Isaac's family. I mean, last week we saw Isaac and Rebecca show favoritism, which is a no-no for any parent.

Jacob, the heel grabber, grabbed his brother's birthright. And Esau, the fool, despised it. And if you think last week was bad, wait until next week.

It gets worse. So why does God bother working with such a dysfunctional family? It's not because they deserve it. But by his grace, he is determined to keep his oath to Abraham.

That's why. What does all this mean for us today here in Melbourne? Point three. Well, some preachers might just jump straight from this chapter to us and go, well, God's going to be with you to bless you with riches.

Go away. Enjoy. But that's not quite how it works. I mean, I'm not sure I really want to be blessed with riches of flocks and herds like Isaac. I mean, one rabbit is enough for me.

[19 : 38] I'm done. Rather, what we need to do when we read the Old Testament, we need to first see how it's fulfilled in Christ and the New Testament.

That's how the Bible works. The Old Testament points us to Jesus Christ and how it's fulfilled in him. And then we need to look in the New Testament to see how it applies to us. And as we do, we see God's determination to keep his oath to Abraham, despite our rotten raw materials, fulfilled in Christ.

And remember the promise back in verse four, that all nations will be blessed through Abraham's offspring. Well, we're the nations. And Abraham's offspring is ultimately Jesus Christ.

So on the next slide, we read from Galatians chapter three in the New Testament. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his offspring. Our scripture does not say, and to offsprings, meaning many people, but to your offspring, meaning one person who is Christ.

That's how it's fulfilled in Jesus, you see. And we heard on the next slide from our second reading, scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham.

[20 : 54] All nations will be blessed through you. So those, that is through his offspring, Jesus. So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

You see, because God was determined to keep his oath to Abraham, he sent his son, Jesus Christ, born in Abraham's family line, the offspring of Abraham.

And Jesus went to the cross to pay for our sins, for all our dysfunction and rotten raw materials. And we who have faith or trust in Jesus can be blessed.

That's how it works. How? Well, for starters, blessed with life eternal, where we are made right with God now and guaranteed of a glorious inheritance later.

I mean, that's not a bad blessing, is it? But only for those who trust in Jesus. And so the first question I need to ask this morning is, do you trust in Jesus?

[21 : 58] Do you have faith, belief in him? That's the only way to benefit from God's blessings. And for us who do, then we also have the blessing of God's spirit living with us, working through our conscience such that God is always with us.

And he will continue to bless us, not with herds and flocks or wells of water. Rather, we need to remember that God's presence with Isaac to bless him was according to the promises he gave Isaac.

Remember, for example, there was a promise of physical land. So God was with him to bless him with physical water and possessions. So he need not fear the famine in the land.

God also promised him offspring. So God was with him to bless him, that he need not fear his wife being taken by another. He failed at that, but God still used Abimelech to protect his marriage.

The point is, God was with Isaac to bless him according to the promises he gave Isaac. And so we need to look at the New Testament to see what promises God has given us, because that's how God will be with us to bless us.

[23 : 08] I remember doing a funeral for one of our members called Faye last year, and in her room she had this plaque. It's on the next slide. It's called What God Hath Promised.

It's a bit hard to read, so let me read it for you. It says, God hath not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But God hath promised strength for the day, rest for the labourer, light on our way, help from above, unfailing sympathy, and undying love.

It's if Faye knew what God did and did not promise her. And that's what she lived in light of. And so on the back of your outlines, I've just given you some examples of what God has promised us from the New Testament.

So for example, the first one there, God has promised that if we believe in Jesus, we have already been given every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[24 : 15] And so we need not fear being a second-class Christian, as sadly some churches teach. You can read the rest of Ephesians chapter 1 to find out what those spiritual blessings include.

Or have a look at the next promise, that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. And therefore we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

And that we can approach God's throne of grace in prayer and find mercy and 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 to save us from hardship, but to give us help through hardship, such that we need not fear it during it. I remember another one of our church members was told that she couldn't walk and she contracted infection in her feet and the doctor said that she would have to have her legs amputated from the knee down.

Needless to say, she wasn't looking forward to that. But what helped her was knowing that nothing would separate her from God's love. She even said, God will still love me if I'm legless, won't he?

[25 : 28] Of course he will. Now don't get me wrong, it wasn't easy for her to say that. She had to keep reading the promises and reminding herself of them. But God was with her to bless her with that help by reminding her that nothing, not even the loss of legs, would separate her from his love.

And God answered her prayer actually and took her to heaven before the surgery so she didn't even have to worry about it. Or the next promise there from Hebrews 13 and Matthew chapter 6 is that God will never leave us nor forsake us and that he will provide for our needs.

So we need not fear being hungry or without clothes. I know of several guys who have gone through unemployment here in our congregation actually. And at the time it was hard to see when God would ever provide.

But time and time again he did. I could think of four, five examples just off the top of my head.

Sometimes we knock back his provision or mess it up so it may take longer.

But God is still with us to bless us with what we need. Or the next promise of peace when we're anxious God will be with us to bless us with peace knowing that we are right with him and he is in control.

[26 : 47] So we need not fear whatever we're anxious about. I know several people from church who one person I was chatting to this morning actually she was about to have surgery and she prayed to God and she kind of cast her anxiety on him said look I don't know what's going to happen I'm going to leave it in your hands pray that prayer and she said to me I felt such a peace going in to the theatre and then she had the general anaesthetic and she had real peace she got knocked out but the point is God was with her to bless her according to this promise.

Or the next promise that God won't let us be tempted beyond what we can bear but always provide a way out. So we need not fear that pleasing God is impossible. It's not. God is with us to bless us and help us resist temptation and please him if we take his help of course.

And on it goes. And let me just refer to a couple more promises. 2 Corinthians 4 it says it's the third last one there our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Last year a friend of ours was diagnosed with leukaemia 30 years old he was aggressive in God's kindness she's now in remission but at the time we were all praying that the treatment would work because she she very much preferred to stay with her husband and see her three kids her three boys grow up.

But knowing God was with her to bless her with glory to come that far outweighs all troubles where she would see them again where whatever she missed out on with them in this life would be more than made up for in the next life it meant she did not fear whether she would go into remission or not.

[28 : 37] You see God is with us to bless us according to his promises. So like Isaac we are not to fear but to trust God's promises.

Just as I is determined to keep my promise to Megan my daughter and so be with Ruby to bless her even with my heater or more importantly just as God is determined to keep his promise to Abraham his oath so as with Isaac to bless him so God is determined to keep his promises to us to be with us and bless us according to them that we need not fear but trust him.

Let me close with the words of an old hymn it 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 you and to bless and work for your good through your deepest distress.

Let's pray. Our 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 you will be with us to bless us according to your promises.

Help us we pray to live by faith for we ask it in Jesus name Amen.