

The Comprehensiveness of the Covenant

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[0 : 00] Good, well let's turn to our reading for this evening. We have visitor Bibles available at the sides, at the back. Please do grab a Bible if you don't have one with you.

And we are in Genesis chapter 26 this evening. That's page 20, if you have a visitor Bible. Genesis 26, and reading from verse 1.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham.

And Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech, king of the Philistines.

And the Lord appeared to him and said, Do not go down to Egypt. Dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you.

For to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands. And I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven.

[1 : 12] And will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

So Isaac settled in Gerar. When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, She is my sister.

For he feared to say, my wife. Thinking, lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebecca. Because she was attractive in appearance. When he had been there a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out of the window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebecca, his wife.

So Abimelech called Isaac and said, Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say she is my sister? Isaac said to him, Because I thought, lest I die because of her.

Abimelech said, What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us. So Abimelech warned all the people saying, Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

[2 : 33] And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him and the man became rich and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.

He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants so that the Philistines envied him. Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.

And Abimelech said to Isaac, Go away from us for you are much mightier than we. So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the valley of Gerar and settled there.

And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them.

But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, The water's ours. So he called the name of the well Essek, because they contended with him.

[3 : 45] Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that as also. So he called its name Sitna. And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it.

So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.

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 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. When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzath, his advisor, and Philcol, the commander of the army, Isaac said to them, Why have you come to see me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?

They said, We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So we said, Let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will not do us no harm, just as we have not touched you, and have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace.

[5 : 13] You are now blessed of the Lord. So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths, and Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

That same day Isaac's servants came, and told them about the well they had dug, and said to him, We have found water. He called it Sheba.

Therefore, the name of this city is Beersheba to this day. Amen. May God bless his word to us. We'll do turn to Genesis and chapter 26. Chapter all about the comprehensiveness of the covenant, and the promise of God to his people.

One really feels for the children of famous people. You know, the people who spend their whole lives being referred to as the son of so-and-so, or so-and-so's daughter. It must be quite hard, mustn't it, to live in the shadow of greatness.

[6 : 30] Well, in Genesis, Abraham, the great Abraham, gets 14 chapters all to himself. Jacob gets 10 chapters all to himself, and Joseph gets another 14.

But in stark contrast, Isaac gets just this one chapter all to himself. And even then, as Ralph Davis quips, Esau gets his foot into the last two verses.

We didn't read them, but they're there. It's the same in the New Testament, in Romans 9, in Hebrews 11, where, again, Abraham dominates. Isaac seems to be just nothing more than a link in the chain.

Through Isaac, pretty much sums up his whole life. And here in Genesis 26, Isaac's whole life really is squeezed into one chapter before the story moves on to those who have got a bigger part to play. But let me just say this. We should be very, very glad that this chapter's here. Because it's so full of encouragement for ordinary people, ordinary believers like us, not mighty heroes of the Christian faith, but those who very often just feel pretty insignificant, pretty small, in the onward march of the kingdom of God.

[7 : 53] And I guess some of us here will know what it feels like to live in the shadow of parents or to live in the shadow of siblings, perhaps. It can be very hard, can't it? And I guess it can be hard, too, as Christians, to know that your life just is a much smaller thing.

It doesn't measure up to the stature of those who have gone before. And if that's you, then this is a very wonderful chapter because, as Ralph Davis puts it, it's a chapter that tells us that God gives His full promise even to His very ordinary servants.

It's a wonderful reminder of that utter comprehensiveness of the Lord's covenant promise to every, what we might say, one-chapter character. Just as the same He gives it to those who fill many chapters of our Bibles, many chapters of our history books, perhaps.

And you and I, you see, like Isaac, we might be pale shadows of the great ones of the faith, like Abraham, but our God is not one whit less than their God.

And it's His same promise that will lighten our path just as brightly as it lightened the paths of the great ones themselves. Well, this chapter falls into four sections.

[9 : 14] If you look carefully, you'll see each section is marked out by brackets by a single word or a phrase. In verse 1 and verse 6, it's Gerar. In verse 7 and 11, it's his wife.

In verse 12 and 22, it's the phrase, in the land. And then in verse 23 and verse 33, the brackets are Beersheba. And each of these four sections speaks of this comprehensive fullness fullness of God's promise, even for the in-betweeners, the ordinary servants of God who may be just links in the chain of the onward march of God's mighty kingdom.

So let's look and see what there is for our encouragement. Verses 1 to 6 tell us that God is still present even with His ordinary servants.

Isaac faces famines in his life just like Abraham did, but God is still present. The Lord is a God who remains with His lesser servants just as He remains with spiritual giants like Abraham.

Verse 1, look, it's a deliberate echo of various episodes from Abraham's life. The famine that took Abraham down to Egypt, remember, back in chapter 12. Again, also the episode in Genesis 20 where Abraham sojourned in Gerar among the Philistines and their king Abimelech.

[10:34] By the way, Abimelech is an official title. It's like Pharaoh. And so this is decades later. It's probably the son of the previous Abimelech from Abraham's day.

But it's a deliberate echo and that's the point. Moses wants his people, that's Israel, who are journeying to Canaan through the wilderness. He wants them to realize that their life of faith is going to face the same things as God's people face in every generation.

all his servants, whether they're great or small, will face famines. And sometimes that will be real and present physical challenges and struggles which seem to threaten life itself.

And what Moses is teaching his sojourning exiles is exactly what the apostle Peter teaches the sojourning exiles of God's people in the New Testament, the church of Jesus Christ today.

These famines, these many trials that we face, Peter says, they shouldn't surprise us. It's just the common experience of God's people in every age and in every place.

[11:39] But, remember, Peter says, you can cast all your cares on the same mighty God who's with you, who cares for you, even in the midst of all of your trials, just like he did with those who have gone before.

That's exactly the message of these verses here. God's presence, God's power is just as real for Isaac as it was for Abraham and as it is for all of his servants.

And we can trust him, we can obey his voice even when God says to us, no, don't take the easy way. Look at verse 2. Don't go down to Egypt. Dwell in the place that I will tell you.

Don't abandon the gospel way, don't abandon the kingdom way to get what you think you need in this famine. It's hard not to do that, isn't it? When you face a famine, whether it's a famine of food or some other need in our lives.

Previous chapters have shown us, haven't there, that there was a famine of females for Isaac, for a wife. But what did Abraham say? No, even so, even if there's no wife for Isaac, we cannot take away that abandons God's kingdom call on our lives.

[12:57] Well, that's still very hard today, isn't it? It's hard in that kind of famine not to feel that you need to go outside the kingdom of God to find a wife or to find a husband or to find some other relationship that actually God has forbidden.

And it's hard to face a famine when perhaps your livelihood depends on it. And maybe when a job offer comes, it'll pay a lot more and it'll solve all sorts of material problems for you, but you know that it will put your spiritual life and indeed your family's spiritual life and their well-being gravely at risk.

It's hard, isn't it? It's hard when God says, no, don't go down to Egypt to solve that problem. How do we react when he does that?

How do we know we can trust God? Well, you see, in these circumstances, God assures us that we can trust and obey him by turning our eyes to the sheer richness of his covenant promise so that we will be able to sing, yes, nothing, nothing compares to the promise that I have in you.

And that's what God tells Isaac here. Do you see how in verses three and four, God repeats the whole of that great promise that he had given to Abraham all through his life from Genesis 12 onwards, repeats it to Isaac, that quad promise of God's presence and his protection.

[14:22] Verse three, I will be with you, I will bless you, and a place for Isaac and his offspring. To you and your offspring I will give all these lands. And verse four, a people like the stars of heaven and a plan to bless the world.

In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. And that's God's promise that was given way back to Abraham and he repeats it here exactly to Isaac just as to his father.

And what's more, as the book of Hebrews tells us, through the fulfillment of all of God's promises in our Lord Jesus Christ, then every single Christian believer today possesses even better promises than these.

And you see, because we know that, we can obey God when he says, don't go the non-kingdom way.

Trust me, obey me. And Isaac did obey verse six. He didn't head for Egypt. He settled in Gerar. That's real faith, isn't it?

[15 : 33] When you see that faith in the midst of famine. But Isaac could obey and Isaac did obey because he realized that God was still present even with him and that God of his father could still be trusted to be good to his promise to him.

Not just a real promise for the future of land and people and a plan and so on, but also a real presence with him in the famine.

verse three, sojourn in this land and I will be with you and will bless you. Moses, who wrote this, he knew what that meant.

In Exodus chapter three, do you remember, God called him to go and speak to Pharaoh and to confront him and Moses said, who on earth am I to go and speak to Pharaoh? Who am I to bring your people Israel out of Egypt?

But what did God say? But I will be with you. And later on, do you remember when Israel turned away in the desert and worshiped the golden calf and again, God said, no, but I and my presence will go with you.

[16 : 44] Right at the very end of Moses' life, do you remember, he assured Joshua, he assured all the people on the brink of the land of Canaan, fear not. It's the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you.

He will never leave you or forsake you either. See, our God is still present even with ordinary servants.

And especially when we face famines in our lives. That's why Hebrews chapter 13 says that we can be at peace, we can be content even then.

Listen, keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have because he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So we can confidently say, he says, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. You see, God is still present even with us as very ordinary servants.

[17 : 46] And yet, you know, fear fear is so often a big part of our life as believers, isn't it? And that often leads us into faithlessness, into folly.

That's why I think verses 7 to 11, the next section here, are really so encouraging because they show us that God still protects even his ordinary servants. Isaac here is fearful and foolish, just like Abraham had been, but God still protects him.

The Lord rescues his lesser servants just as he does his giants when they get themselves into a mess of their own making. It's obvious, by the way, that this part of the story predates what we read last week about the birth of the twins because this whole wife-sister ploy would hardly work, would it, if there's cries of mommy and daddy from twins running around in the tents.

And verse 7, you see, poses a problem because God had given Isaac a very beautiful wife. Even a beautiful wife can be a problem, it seems.

Well, sometimes God's good and best gifts can be big problems to us, can't they? They can make us forget God. Remember that verse in Proverbs 30 about not forgetting God when he gives us too much.

[19 : 05] And that's what happened here, verse 7. Isaac feared. He feared that he was going to be killed on account of his beautiful wife. And again, this situation just mirrors a habitual weakness in Isaac's father, Abraham.

Do you remember? Abraham feared the same thing about losing his wife. And it's sobering, isn't it, to realize that what we pass on to our children and what we inherit from our parents is just our sinful natures.

We can't pass on, can we, the redeeming work of God's grace in our lives. It's only what we would be without God's redeeming grace that we will naturally pass on to our progeny. And surely that fact alone, if we're honest about ourselves, that fact should drive us both in our prayers for our children and in our priorities for their lives that they should know that same grace that alone has saved us from ourselves.

But Isaac feared and humanly speaking, there was no empty fear. Verse 10, I think, testifies to that because Abimelech clearly knows that the local men were quite capable of sexually abusing this foreigner.

And it's often that way still today, isn't it? So often it's the ghastly stories that we hear about trafficked aliens and immigrants falling victim to sexual exploitation and the sex slavery and so on.

[20 : 41] So this is not an unnatural fear, but Isaac's fear here betrayed somehow a lack of faith in the very thing that God had just reiterated to him, that God would be present and protect him by blessing him.

And notice, by the way, in verse 8, we're told that they'd lived there for quite a long time. So apparently they'd been unmolested for a long time. So that rather proves how real God's protection was.

Derek Kidner, I think, puts it very well. He says, typically human, Isaac mixed faith and fear, an incompatible combination which can give a special quality of meanness to the sins of the religious and none more so than here.

And you do wonder, I think, what long-term effect this deception of Isaac and putting his wife at risk like that had on their marriage. Some of the disharmony that we'll read about later on in chapter 27 may well have had its seed in resentments that were sown in Rebecca's heart during this time here. It's possible, I think, isn't it, sometimes for a spouse and probably especially for a man to inflict a wound on his wife through some kind of callous neglect at a particular time of need and that wound can fester and begin to utterly poison the marriage relationship.

[22 : 10] I'm sure many of us have seen that happening. It's easy to fault, Isaac, until, of course, we look back at our own lives than some of the things that we ourselves have done in far less life-threatening situations perhaps than here.

Times when instead of trusting God's Word, we've taken matters into our own hands. We sometimes thought we'd known better and sometimes have acted actually very dishonorably. And none of God's servants are free from the stain of sin, are they? Are we? None of us are free from the shadow of the serpent. Not you, not me, not Isaac here.

And yet, and yet, God still protects his servant. Not this time by plagues, that was Genesis 12. Not by God's blinding revelation and threats of punishment on Abimelech, like he did back in chapter 20, but this time it's almost amusingly just through the quiet workings of God's gracious providence.

[23 : 13] verse 8, no doubt this, this sick sister act was rather hard going for Isaac. We're told specifically his wife was very beautiful.

He was a man with the same hormones as all the rest of us. Verse 8 in my version anyway is a bit prudish. Laughing with his wife.

If you've got an authorized version, it says sporting. It wasn't badminton or tennis, by the way. It wasn't badminton or tennis, by the way. The NIV is a little bit better. Caressing. They're all euphemisms.

They were having an Edward Lobb's term, a game of Scrabble, I think. Or asked Phil Copeland about the Iranian embassy siege. We'll say no more, but what Abimelech clearly sees when he's looking out of the window here in this al fresco scene is very obvious and the game is up. It's a bit like two teenagers coming out from behind the school bike sheds, you know, and saying, oh, miss, we were just talking and the chap is all covered in lipstick on his face. Well, it doesn't really wash, does it? I don't mean the lipstick, I mean the situation.

[24 : 18] And that's what Abimelech is saying here in verse 9. Come off it. We all kiss our sisters at Christmas, but not like that, Isaac. It's obvious. She's your wife, for goodness sake. Why did you do this? And he's very worried.

Look at verse 10. Because he remembers, doesn't he, that during his father's time, this kind of situation very nearly brought a very great curse on the whole of the nation.

He doesn't want that here. And so look at verse 11. He puts a royal protection order on Isaac and on his wife. And it's a great irony, isn't it?

Because the protection that Isaac sought for himself through fear was utterly illusory. And yet it came to him God's way through the exposure of his own folly as a reminder, a gentle reminder to him that God can be trusted.

You can mess it up, Isaac, but I'll still do what I promised. Isn't it encouraging that God protects even his fearful and foolish servants, even when they mess it up?

[25 : 25] And he still does today. I find great comfort in these words. In Psalm 105, let me read some to you from verse 8. He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded.

For a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac. When Israel were few in number of little account and sojourners in the land, wandering from nation

to nation, from one kingdom to another people, he allowed no one to oppress them. He rebuked kings on their account, saying, Touch not my anointed ones. Do my prophets no harm. He protects his anointed ones even when they mess it up. And you see, the apostle John tells us, doesn't he, that we ordinary believers, we also have an anointing that is not counterfeit. We're anointed to be his, to speak for him, to be his prophets to this world. What a botch of it we make a lot of the time. We certainly do, both in our lives and in the church. But, what a comfort that God still protects even his ordinary servants, even when they make a mess of it. [26 : 46] That's a wonderful message, wasn't it, for Moses' people to hear, the Israelites, that God doesn't abandon you when you screw it up, when you get it wrong, when your fears lead you constantly to go astray.

They needed that. And what a message to us as well. Well, certainly, a message to me. He protects his servants still, even when they get it wrong. And, he prospers them despite the struggles that always will dog the life of faith. That's surely the message of the next section, verses 12 to 22, because they focus on the Lord's blessing on Isaac as he tufted out in the land of promise, in the footsteps of his father's great legacy. Isaac isn't Abraham, but God still provides, even for his ordinary servants. Isaac faces constant foes, constant frustration, just like Abraham, but God still provides for him. And the Lord brings relief amid the battles for his little ones, just as he does for the really big players in the story of his kingdom.

[28 : 04] If the blessings of God were earned by our faithfulness, by our obedience, by our performance, we really would be in dire streets. That's human religion, of course, in all of its forms, whether it's overtly religious in its type, earning things through rituals or sacrifices or prayers or penances or whatever, or whether it's the secular type of religion where you're trying to earn all of these things through, I don't know, your diet or your commitment to the gym or to education or to wealth or to whatever kind of virtue signaling it is that you think will prosper you.

But no, here in verses 12 and 13, you see, there's a God who blesses fearful saints who sometimes feel very foolish and very feeble. A God who blesses according to promise, not according to performance, who promises according to His grace, not according to our graft. And yet, you see, that kind of God will always be roundly resisted. That idea of grace will always be despised and resisted by human beings.

It's anathema to the human heart, isn't it? Because we say, well, why Him? Why should He have that? Not me. And that's verse 14. It's not uncommon, is it? Envy. Wealthy foreigners, Isaac and Abraham, non-doms, taking all our wealth, not paying enough tax. Very contemporary, isn't it? There's a natural element to that envy and the politics of envy is always with us. But even more so here, there's a very spiritual aspect because there's a threat here to the promise of God.

[29 : 47] The promise that this land is for Isaac, for his seed. And back in chapter 21, Abimelech's predecessor, his father probably, he'd made a treaty with Abraham that guaranteed him the wells upon which his survival depended.

But look at verse 15 here. You see, they'd reneged on it. Now they'd filled in all the wells again to prevent Abraham's family from being able to survive and pasture their flocks and so on. And you see, this illustrates to us a simple truth that the community, the family of faith in the promise will never have a permanent accord with the people of this world. Just as later on in Egypt, remember. There was peaceful coexistence for a while after the great one Joseph had saved Egypt. But then what do we read? There arose a pharaoh who knew not Joseph. And normal hostilities resumed. And that's what we're seeing, isn't it, today in our Western world. Centuries of Christendoms now a thing of the past.

[30 : 55] The wells that our forefathers dug have been systematically filled in. And increasingly, the church, the true church of Jesus, that is, the church and the state are once again increasingly in open hostility.

That is what we are living through. That is what our children are going to live through more and more. Because God's people on this earth will always be sojourners, just like the patriarchs.

But, God is with us, just as He was with them. We, yes, says Peter, we are exiles, aliens, just like them.

But we are elect. We belong to Him who is blessing us still according to the same promise. But, just like Isaac, that promise will always, always be mixed with conflict.

Always there will be foes. That's what Jesus said. wherever the seed of the kingdom is flourishing, wherever it's bearing fruit, said Jesus, in all those parables, remember, there will be enemies doing what?

[32 : 02] Sowing seeds of conflict. God blessed Isaac in the land, but the Philistines envied him.

He provides, yes, for His servants, but there is relentless conflict. Envy, verse 14. Verse 20, quarreling and contention as the next generation just plods on, digging the wells that are necessary just to stay alive in the place that God has called them to be.

I don't know about you, but I find this picture in these verses extraordinarily realistic about the life of faith. What was it, Alexander White, once said?

Yeah, yeah, it's a serfecht richter the end. A sore fight right till the very, very end of the life of faith. And I think Isaac here would have said a hearty amen to that sentiment.

You never arrive. It's a battle just to survive. It's a constant round of digging and re-digging all over again what a previous generation dug, but then becomes dismantled.

[33 : 18] Isn't that the Christian life? But do these trials, do these constant conflicts mean that God has abandoned his servants?

Do they mean that God's reneged on the blessing? No, not at all. It's the very opposite. We're told the Lord blessed him, verse 12. He reiterates it wonderfully in verse 24.

I will bless you. But just as so often in the life of faith, great blessing will bring great trials. Read through your New Testament, friends.

Remember what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16. He says, a wide and effective door for the gospel has opened unto me and there are many adversaries. And that's just exactly what we see here.

And yet, wonderfully, in the midst, there are times of relief. Look at verse 22. At last they dig a well and there's no quarreling of it.

[34 : 19] There's a breathing space. And Isaac calls it Rehoboth because the Lord had given him room, given him space, given him some relief.

That's what the word means. And he sees again, clearly, the truth of the promise that we shall be fruitful in the land, despite everything.

And that's so familiar, isn't it? Because sometimes the life of faith just does seem to be a constant round of digging just to keep your head above water. Isn't that right? You sometimes think, will things ever be normal again?

Will there ever be peace? And in one sense, the answer, friends, is no, because this is just the normal Christian life. But God does still provide.

And he provides times of Rehoboth, space, times of relief, just enough so that we can clear our heads and get the picture once again and see his promise for us and for our families.

[35 : 26] And he knows we need that because he remembers what we're made of. He remembers that we're dust, says the psalmist, even though sometimes we don't remember that. And just as Moses reminded his people constantly that there was a rest, a time of rest that lay ahead of them when God would enlarge their territory, bring them Rehoboth, space, the same word as here, he reminds us also, doesn't he, that there will at last be lasting relief from the battles and the slogs of the life of faith.

There is a rest that remains for the people of God, the ultimate rest in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. He puts that before us but also in his kindness, in his mercy.

He gives us foretastes even now, doesn't he? Times of refreshment, times of relief, space, from the relentless digging in the face of opposition, without an opposition within.

Isn't that the blessing that he gives us weekly in the rest of the Lord's day? Every seventh day he gives us a Rehoboth, a resting place, a space to turn our minds and hearts once again to the wonders of his promise.

We should receive that blessing, shouldn't we, with gladness. We should let its relief and its respite restore us week by week. Don't deny yourself that blessing of God by forcing yourself to dig wells seven days a week when God has given you a Rehoboth, a day of rest.

[37 : 02] I'm sure you can look back as I can many times in your life when in the midst of battles, in the midst of great struggles in your Christian walk, God has given you a time of relief, a space, some room when you felt hemmed in.

That's what the psalmist expresses, I think, in Psalm 31 when he says, You have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy, you have set my feet in a broad space, a broad place.

You've given me room, Rehoboth. Wouldn't be a bad thing, would it, to keep a Rehoboth diary, to remind yourself of all God's provisions in the past at times of great stress and great need when he's given you that rest and just refocused your mind and reminded you of his goodness and his grace and his provision for you in the midst of those battles and that relentless slog.

But finally, look at verses 23 to 33, this last section, which reminds us that in the midst of all of this, God does still bring peace even through his ordinary servants.

Isaac's a foreigner, just like his father Abraham, but God still brings peace. The Lord brings a response, he brings recognition from the surrounding pagans through the witness of Isaac, through the witness of the lesser saint, just as he does through the witness of those who have a great and very special calling from God.

[38 : 31] It's back in chapter 21 at the time of Isaac's birth that a previous Abimelech came to Abraham and he said to Abraham, clearly God is with you in everything you do.

And so he wanted to make a peace treaty with him, with this man who clearly was a friend of God, but it was at the same place as this, Beersheba, the well of the earth, the place that Abraham then called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.

And the pagan world, you see, could see in Abraham that the everlasting God was with this man. And it recognized that and responded to him.

So what an encouragement that here too, after all the relentless slog, all the conflicts, all the digging and re-digging, that this Abimelech saw exactly the same thing in Abraham's son Isaac.

And Isaac Lee, no doubt thought the Philistines were nothing but hostile. Verse 27, he says, you hate me. You want rid of me. And there was hostility.

[39 : 35] And yes, he was resisted because of what he represented, because he represented the promise of God. He represented the salvation of God, the Christ of God, the seed who was to come.

And that was a very great threat to the whole pagan world. And that Christ, ultimately, the Lord Jesus himself, said, all my people will always be reviled on my account.

Yet paradoxically, right there, when he said that in Matthew chapter 5, he went right on to say that nevertheless, my people are the light of the world. And that that light will shine.

And it will lead others to see the glory of the Father who's in heaven. And that is exactly what we're seeing in these verses here. Despite the hostility, look at verse 28.

We see plainly that the Lord is with you. Despite all of Isaac's faults, which Abimelech knew better than anybody.

[40 : 35] Yet he saw something real, verse 29. You, do you see, you are now the blessed of the Lord. God had reminded Isaac of that on his arrival at Beersheba.

In verse 23, in these wonderful words, fear not, I am the God of Abraham, your father. I am with you. I will bless you. I will multiply your offspring for Abraham's sake.

And God had given him now space, room, to live in peace, verse 25. Look, he had God's presence. He had an altar to meet with God. He had a place. He had a land to pitch his tent.

He had God's provision. He had wells to sustain his life. All the blessings that were needed to live in peace in this world. But God had also promised something more, to bring peace through him.

You will be a blessing to others, was the great covenant promise to Abraham. And fruitfulness in the land, you see, was not just to be for him, but through him.

[41 : 40] Abraham, do you remember, the great prophet of God, the great priest of God, he had interceded, hadn't he, to bring blessing to Abraham, the pagan king, to bring blessing to all his people as well as many others. And so now also will you, God says to Isaac.

Despite all his fears and failings, even among this people, despite all the slog, all the conflict, do you think Isaac must have felt that God's blessing had been removed from him because of the opposition that was relentless, because of all of these disasters?

And we often think that, don't we, when life seems to just not go according to how we think it ought to go. But no, God made it clear to him. His promise remained.

Not because of Isaac's status or preeminence or performance, but because of God's presence with him, still, just as he'd been with his father. That's what makes someone a blessing.

If he is there, it doesn't matter about our inadequacies because he will be sensed, he will be felt, he'll be heard, his voice will be heard through us.

[42 : 53] It's having God with you that really matters, whether you're one of the great ones like Abraham or whether you're just an ordinary servant like the Israelites under Moses. Remember later in Joshua chapter 2, Rahab the harlot comes to them and says, surely God is with you and I need to find peace through you, she said to them.

Later on, the Gibeonites were the same with Joshua. They saw that this people, for all their fault, had God with them and they did everything they could to force themselves into that peace of God. We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. Friends, that should really encourage us in our life of witness.

Because here's the thing, like Isaac, your friends, your family, the people you mix with, they know your faults. It may come as a surprise to you, but your faults are not a surprise to them.

But here's the thing, if the Lord is really with you, they will sense that. They will sense that. And God can and God still does bring peace to unbelieving people through ordinary, very inadequate servants because He is with them.

[44 : 10] He's with them. That's His promise to us, isn't it? Go into the world and make disciples of all nations.

And lo, I am with you. Always. To the very end of the age. Peter says to us, we're foreigners, we're aliens, among the Gentiles, but He says, people will see your lives and will be led to give glory to God through ordinary saints and through ordinary churches.

God is with us. Even in ordinary church meetings just like this this evening. That's what Paul says, isn't it, to the Corinthian church.

If God is in the midst, if He's present because His word is being spoken, even complete outsiders may not understand much, but they will sense His presence.

They'll fall on their faces and say, God really is among you. You mixed bag of strange and odd people. And that's what happened here, you see, with this pagan king through Isaac, through the one chapter man.

[45 : 32] He lived in the shadow, didn't He? Of the greatness of His ancestors. But His God was the same and this is the God who comes the same way to hard-pressed ordinary servants.

And He says, fear not because I'm with you and I will make you fruitful in the place that I've called you. Aren't you glad that Abraham's God, the everlasting God, is also the same God of little ones like Isaac?

the God who cares about His struggling servants, who rewards them and reminds them often that if He is with them, no matter how beleaguered we feel, that He will make us fruitful.

people will find their peace with God even among us. None of us, none of us are like Abraham or Moses or the Apostle Paul.

Few of us, probably none of us, will have any chapters in any books ever written about us, far less 10 or 14 or great tomes. We're much more like Isaac, aren't we? Our lives of faith, yes, they bear a familiar pattern to the great servants that we read about in the Bible to the great ones we read about in Christian biographies, but they're just on a much smaller scale.

[47 : 09] But we have the same God and He's still present with us even in the midst of our particular famines. And He still protects us despite our fears, despite our foolishness and our folly.

And He still provides in the midst of our struggle and of our conflicts. And He will still bring peace. Peace with contentment to us in our walk with Him, but also peace through us to those who see however much our faith is feeble, who see that nevertheless God is with us and that His presence is so powerful it's the only thing that really matters at all.

It's the everlasting God, the God of Abraham, who has promised to be with every ordinary servant who loves the Lord Jesus Christ. If you love me, says Jesus, I will not leave you as orphans.

If anyone loves me, He says, He'll keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and we will make our home with him.

You see, that is how comprehensive the covenant promise of the gospel is to every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

[48 : 43] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we we thank you that however small we feel, however small we are, however frail and foolish we often show ourselves to be, that you are our God, the same sovereign protector, the God of Abraham, the God of Jacob, the God of Joseph, and also the God of Isaac, the one chapter man.

Amen. So, Lord, remind us, we pray, of your greatness and of your goodness, of your nearness, and of the wonderful comprehensiveness of your promise to us.

For Christ's sake. Amen.