

35. The Comprehensiveness of the Covenant Promise (2007)

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our reading for this morning and we're right back at the beginning in the book of Genesis and Genesis chapter 26.

And we're going to read together the whole chapter. Oh, you just notice as we go through the structure of the chapter, there are four sections and you'll see each held in brackets, verses 1 to 6, verses 7 to 11, 12 to 22, and verse 23 to 33.

And just see if you can spot the same word that occurs in the first and the last verse of each of those sections that helps bracket it off for us. Genesis 26.

Abraham, your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and I 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 and my commandments, my statutes and my laws.

So Isaac settled in Deirar. When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, she's my sister. For he feared to save my wife, thinking lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebecca, because she was attractive in appearance.

[1 : 53] When he had been there a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing. Better translation would be caressing Rebecca, his wife.

So Abimelech called Isaac and said, behold, she's your wife. How then could you say she's 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.

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.

[3 : 00] 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 is ours.

So he called the name of the well Isaac, because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also. So he called its name Sitna, which means enmity.

And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehavoth, saying, from 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.

[4 : 15] So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And Isaac's servants dug a well. When Abimelech went to him from Gerah with Ahuzai his advisor and Fekol the commander of his army, Isaac said to him, Why have you come to 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 do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done nothing but good to you and sent you away in peace.

You are now the 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 him about the well that they had dug and said to him, We have found water. He called it Shiva. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Well, if you turn with me to Genesis chapter 26, and the first 33 verses, chapter all about the comprehensiveness of the covenant promise.

[5 : 45] Must be hard, wasn't it, to be the child of a great hero, a famous sports star perhaps, or an international leader, a world famous statesman, like Nelson Mandela or somebody like that.

To always live your life as the son of so-and-so or the daughter of so-and-so. It must also be hard to be the son of a great hero of the faith. You have to feel for Isaac, don't you?

The son of Abraham, the great patriarch. The father of Jacob, who became Israel, the father of the nation. Abraham gets 14 chapters in Genesis.

Jacob gets 10. Joseph gets another 14. But Isaac just gets this one chapter. And even then, as Ralph Davis points out, Esau has to muscle in on the last couple of verses, so he doesn't get it all to himself.

It's the same in Hebrews 11, the great New Testament chapter about the heroes of the faith. Abraham dominates the chapter with 12 verses, more than a quarter of the chapter. Moses has six verses.

[6 : 52] And poor old Isaac, just the one. And even then, it's just about the blessings that he gave to his two sons. Through Isaac is the phrase in both Romans 9 and Hebrews 11 that seems to sum up Isaac's part in God's plan.

It's just as though he's a little link in the chain, in between far greater characters before and after. And that's really what we see here in Genesis chapter 26.

Isaac's whole life is squeezed into this one chapter before the story of Jacob and Esau continues. And it's almost as if the writer is saying, well, here's everything you need to know about Isaac, this link in the chain, before we focus more properly again on God's special servants and those who have a big place in his ongoing plan and purpose.

But can I say to you, I am very, very glad that this chapter is here. And I hope to show you why you should be too. Because it's a wonderful chapter of encouragement.

Encouragement for believers who might feel very ordinary. Perhaps very small. Perhaps very much less than others whose place in God's plan and purpose seems so much more prominent, so much bigger, so much more important than theirs.

[8 : 12] Maybe people who feel that they have also lived all their lives in other people's shadows, the shadow of parents or siblings or maybe just friends and colleagues. People who say to themselves, well, of course, I'm just a very ordinary church member.

Or maybe those who've been called to serve in some ministry, perhaps feeling much less adequate, much less gifted than others are who serve in that same ministry.

Or maybe it is that you find yourself serving in exactly the same way as your mother or your own father, but knowing that you will never, ever measure up to their stature. That at your very best, you're only ever going to be a pale reflection of what they were.

And you know that other people know that. And you know it yourself. Well, friends, if that's you, and I'm sure that may be many of us here this morning, then this is a chapter for you.

And it's a chapter for me. Because it's a chapter that tells us, as again Ralph Davis has put it, that the Lord gives his full promise even to his very ordinary servants.

[9 : 19] It's a wonderfully encouraging chapter, all about the comprehensiveness of God's covenant promise to his people. The Lord, the God of Isaac, our Lord and God, gives his full promise even to ordinary servants like us, even to one-chapter characters, just as he gives it to those who fill many, many pages in our Bibles.

And you and I, like Isaac, may be a pale shadow of the great hero of the faith that Abraham was. But our God is not a whit less than the God of Abraham.

And his promise will lighten our path just as brightly as it did for the great patriarch himself. And that's what this chapter is here to tell us. You'll see, as I said in the reading, it breaks up into four sections, each held in brackets.

Verses 1 and 6, the bracket is the word girer. Then in verses 7 and 11, the brackets are his wife. And in 12 and 22, it's the phrase in the land. And then in verse 22 and 33, it's the location, Beersheba.

So we'll look at these in turn, shall we, and ask what each is telling us about the comprehensiveness of God's promise, even for in-betweeners, even for ordinary servants of God who are just links in the chain of his great plan and purpose of grace.

[10 : 48] So look at verses 1 to 6. These are verses that tell us that God is still present even with his ordinary servants. Isaac faces famines in life just as Abraham did, but God is still present with him.

The Lord is a God who remains with his lesser servants just as he does with his spiritual giants. Verse 1, you see, is a deliberate echo of various episodes from Abraham's life, like the famine that took him to Egypt in chapter 12 and the episode in chapter 20 when Abraham also went to Gerar and lived among the Philistines and their king, Abimelech.

Abimelech, by the way, is an official title. It's rather like Pharaoh. And since this is probably decades later, it's most likely this is the son or perhaps even the grandson of that previous king from Abraham's day.

But the point surely is very clear and deliberate, isn't it? Moses wants his people, the Israelites who are on their journey to Canaan, he wants them to realize that the life of faith will be the same for every single generation.

All his servants, all God's servants, whether they're great or small, are going to face famines in their life, real times of testing and trial, perhaps times that really do present physical challenges to survival, struggles that might threaten life itself.

[12 : 13] And what Moses is teaching his sojourning exiles is exactly what the apostle Peter teaches, the same elect exiles that we are in the New Testament, Christ's people today.

These famines, says Peter, these trials that we face shouldn't surprise us, it's just the conscious experience of all God's people. All God's servants through the ages will experience these trials.

But as Peter says in his letter, you can cast all of your cares upon God because he is with you and he cares for you even in the midst of them. That's exactly what these verses are telling us here in Genesis.

God's presence and God's power are just as real for Isaac as they were for Abraham, as they are for all his servants. And we can trust him and obey him even when God says, no, don't take the easy way, verse 2.

Don't go down to Egypt for food but dwell in the land 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 a time of trial.

[13 : 23] It's hard not to do that, isn't it, when you face famine? Whether it's a food or whether it's some other real need in your life. There had been a famine of females, hadn't there, in the previous chapter or two for Isaac but Abraham said, no, even if there's no wife for Isaac, we can't take away that abandons God's kingdom call in our lives.

As we said, that's still hard today, isn't it? Hard in that kind of famine not to feel that you can go outside the kingdom for a wife or for a husband or for some other forbidden partnership.

It's hard to face a famine when your livelihood might be at stake. Perhaps a job offer comes up that would pay a lot more and that would solve an awful lot of your material problems but you know that it will be bad for your spiritual life.

You know that it's going to be bad for your own family's spiritual well-being. Put them at risk. It's hard, isn't it, when in that situation God says, no, don't go down to Egypt.

How do we react? How do we know we can trust God? In these circumstances God assures us that we can obey him by turning our eyes once again to the sheer richness of his covenant promise so that we are able to sing nothing compares to the promise that I have in you.

[14 : 47] That's what God tells Isaac here. Do you see in verses 3 and 4? He repeats, doesn't he, the whole of the promise that God had given in Abraham's life from chapter 12 following.

The quad promise as we've called it. The promise of God's presence and protection. I will be with you and I will bless you. The promise of a place for Isaac and his offspring.

To you and your offspring I will give all these lands. And of a people like the stars of heaven and of God's plan to bless the world through them. In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

And this great promise is repeated and it's applied by God here personally to Isaac just as it had been to Abraham. And moreover as the book of Hebrews tells us through the fulfillment of God's promises in the Lord Jesus Christ every single Christian believer today has even better promises than this.

And because we know that we can obey God when he says don't go the non-kingdom way. Trust me. Keep going my way. And so Isaac did obey says verse 6.

[16 : 00] He didn't head for Egypt. He stayed in Gerar. That's real faith isn't it to do that in the midst of famine. But Isaac could obey and he did obey because he realized that God was still present even with him.

That the God of his father could be trusted to be true to the promise that he'd given. Not just not just a real promise for the future of land and people and blessing and so on but a real presence with him in the famine.

Sojourn verse 3 in this land and I will be with you to bless you. And Moses the writer knew exactly what that promise meant in Exodus chapter 3 when God called him to go to Pharaoh and to lead Israel out.

He comforted Moses. Moses had said who am I to go to Pharaoh and lead out Israel from Egypt but God said but I will be with you. And then later on when Israel had sinned with the golden calf God again assured Moses about his people and his ongoing presence.

My presence will go with you he said. And at the very end of Moses' life do you remember he speaks to Joshua and to all the people as they're on the brink of the land of Canaan and says fear not it's the Lord who goes before you he will be with you and he will never leave you nor forsake you.

[17 : 23] He would be saying our God is still present with you with his ordinary servants and especially when we're facing famines in our lives.

That's why in Hebrews chapter 13 the apostle says that we can be at peace and content even in situations of want. keep yourselves free from the love of money he says and be content with what you have for he has said I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So we can confidently say the Lord is my helper I will not fear. God is still present even with his very ordinary servants.

And yet fear is still a very big part of our lives as believers isn't it? Alas that fear often leads us into faithlessness and folly and that's really what verses 7 to 11 are about and why they're so encouraging because they tell us that God still protects his ordinary servants.

Isaac is fearful and foolish just as Abraham had been but God still protects him. The Lord rescues his lesser servants just as he does his giants when they get themselves in a mess of their own making.

[18 : 40] Isn't that encouraging to us? It's obvious isn't it that this chapter predates the birth of the twins because this whole wife-sister ploy would hardly work very well if there's little ones running around in the tent shouting mummy and daddy to Isaac and Rebecca.

Verse 7 poses the problem do you see? Isaac had a very beautiful wife but even a very beautiful wife can be a problem. I can hear a few murmurs coming around.

congregation with that. Well sometimes God's good gifts can be our downfall can't they? If they make us forget the Lord. Read Proverbs 30 verse 8.

And that's what happens here you see verse 7 Isaac feared feared lest he be killed on account of his beautiful wife. Now again this situation mirrors exactly doesn't it the habitual weakness of Abraham his father.

And it's a sobering thing isn't it to think and to realize that we inherit and that we pass on to our children only our sinful natures not the redeeming work of God's grace in our lives.

[19 : 52] It's only what we would be without God's grace in our lives that we can physically endow upon our offspring. Surely that fact if we're honest about our own hearts will drive us in our prayers for our children and also in our priorities for them that they would find the same grace that alone has saved us from ourselves.

But Isaac feared just like Abraham. And humanly speaking it wasn't an empty fear was it? Because verse 10 is plain Abimelech knew only too well that the men of the place were certainly capable of sexually abusing this foreign woman.

Well it's just the same today isn't it? It's often the alien and the immigrant who falls prey to the dreadful abuse of sexual exploitation. But you see Isaac's fear betrayed a lack of faith in the very thing that God had just reiterated to him and told him.

God's presence and protection and his blessing and his promise for Isaac's family in the future. And notice verse 8 tells us that they lived there a long time quite unmolested and that just proved that God's promise could be trusted.

Derek Kidner puts it exactly when he says typically human Isaac mixes faith and fear an incompatible combination which can give a special quality of meanness to the sins of the religious and nowhere more so than here.

[21 : 23] One does wonder I suppose what long term effect there was on the marriage. Whether some of the disharmony that we'll read about in chapter 27 had its seeds in resentment and hurt in Rebecca's heart dating back to that time must have been awful mustn't it?

It is possible isn't it for a marriage partner I think especially a man it's possible for a man to inflict a wound on his wife through some particularly callous neglect at a time of great vulnerability that will then cause a wound that will fester and ultimately poison that whole relationship.

But it's easy to fault Isaac isn't it until we look back on our own lives and our own unfaithfulness in many things that are far far less life threatening than this situation. Where instead of trusting God's word we've taken matters into our own hands sometimes perhaps very dishonorably so.

None of God's servants is free from the stain of sin. None of us is free from the shadow of the serpent not you not me and not Isaac here and yet God still protects his servant not this time by plagues as it was in Genesis 12 not by God's blinding revelation of punishment to the king as it was in chapter 20 but rather almost amusingly by the quiet workings of his providence.

Verse 8 no doubt the sister act was rather hard going for Isaac after all he was a man he had a beautiful wife he had the same hormones as all the rest of us. Verse 8 in our version I think is a little bit prudish really.

[22 : 59] the authorised version and says Isaac was sporting with his wife but it wasn't badminton and it wasn't tennis. The NIV I think is rather better. They were caressing. We'll say no more but when Abimelech happens to look out of the window he sees this little alfresco scene and the game is up.

Perfectly obvious. A bit like two teenagers being caught by a teacher coming out from behind the bike sheds. We're just chatting. We're just friends. As the chap's walking on the lipstick off his face. It doesn't wash does it.

I mean the situation not the lipstick. The lipstick probably doesn't wash either. That's what Abimelech says isn't it? Come off it. We all kiss our sisters at Christmas but I've never seen anybody kissing their sister like that.

And Abimelech you see is actually worried isn't he? Because he knew that in his father's time something like this happened and brought a great curse upon himself and his family and all of his people.

He doesn't want that happening here. That's why in verse 11 he puts a royal protection order on Isaac and Rebecca. It's very ironic isn't it? The protection that Abraham tried to get for himself through his own fears proved to be illusory.

[24 : 11] And yet it came God's way as God exposed his own folly and just gave him a gentle reminder that actually you can trust me. God protects even his fearful and foolish servants even when they mess it up.

And he still does. I take great comfort from the words in Psalm 105 about this. Listen. 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 there were few in number of little account and sojourners in the land wandering from nation to nation from one kingdom to another.

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 screw it all up.

You know the New Testament tells us that we ordinary believers we also have an anointing. Not counterfeit it's real. We have anointing to be his and to speak for him as his prophets to this world.

[25 : 30] And what a botch of it we make at times. Isn't that so? Both in our own lives and in the church. And what a comfort that God still protects his servants.

What a message for the Israelites of old under Moses that our God doesn't abandon you even when you mess it all up, even when you get it wrong, even when your fears lead you astray. What a message for us too.

At least for somebody like me. He protects his servants and he prospers them despite the struggles that they face in their ongoing life in faith.

That's surely the message of the next section, verses 12 to 22, which focus on the Lord's blessing on Isaac as he toughs it out in the land of promise in the footsteps of his father's journey. Isaac isn't Abraham, but God still provides for his ordinary servants.

Isaac faces constant foes and 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 big players in his story.

[26 : 40] If the blessings of God were earned by our faithfulness or our obedience or our performance, my goodness, we really would be in dire straits, wouldn't we? That's human religion, of course, all human religion in whatever form it's in, whether it's the overtly religious type of seeking blessing through rituals or sacrifices or whatever, or whether it's the secular type that seeks blessing through your diet or through your commitment to the gym or through your education or your wealth or your career or whatever it is.

But here in verses 12 and 13 is a God who blesses fearful saints who are sometimes very feeble and very foolish. A God who blesses according to promise, not according to performance, according to his grace, not according to our graft.

He blessed him in the land and he reaped a hundredfold. And yet, you see, that sort of God is roundly resisted by the people of our world, isn't he?

That kind of grace is greatly despised. It's anathema to the human heart, isn't it? We say, why him and not me? Verse 14 shouldn't surprise us, should it?

The Philistines envied him. Wealthy foreigners coming in here, taking our jobs and our wealth and paying far too little tax. Isn't that what the papers have been filled off this week in the budget? Exactly that.

[28 : 07] There's a natural aspect, isn't there, to this envy in verse 14, but there's also a spiritual aspect. There's a threat here to the promise of God, the promise that this land is for Isaac and his seed.

Back in chapter 21, Abimelech, the predecessor, had made a treaty with Abraham and guaranteed him the wells for his survival. But as verse 15 says, they'd reneged on that.

They'd filled him in again to prevent Abraham and his family of faith surviving there with their flocks. That's a simple truth, isn't it, that we need to learn that the community of faith will never ever have permanent concord with the people of this age.

Just a little later on in Egypt, in the story of Joseph, we'll read the same thing. There was peaceful coexistence for a while, but then arose a pharaoh who knew not Joseph, and again all the hostilities resumed that led to the exodus.

It's just the same today, isn't it, in the West, in our Western world. The Christendom that we've all known is now a thing of the past. All the wells that were dug by our forefathers have been systematically filled in, and the church and the state are once again increasingly in open hostility.

[29 : 21] Isn't that exactly what we're living through today? God's people on this earth will always be sojourners, just like the patriarchs.

God is with us, just as he was with them. We are exiles, we are aliens, just as they were, but we are elect, and we belong to the one who blesses still, according to promise.

But, you see, like Isaac, our blessings will always be mixed with constant conflict. Always, there will be constant foes, just as Jesus said. Wherever the seed of the kingdom is being planted, and where it's flourishing and bearing fruit, there will be those who are sowing weeds of conflict, and so it will be until the last day.

God blessed Isaac, and the Philistines envied him. He provides for his servants, but there is and always will be relentless conflict. Envy, verse 14.

Quarreling over the well, verse 20. Contention. As the next generation plods on, digging the wells that are necessary just to stay alive in the place that God calls them to be.

[30 : 34] I don't know about you, but I find this picture here in these verses so extraordinarily realistic. It's a totally realistic picture of the life of faith, isn't it? It's a ser fecht right to the end, is what Alexander White said.

And I'm sure Isaac would have stood up here and said, Amen. You never arrive. It's a battle just to survive.

It's a constant round of digging and re-digging all over again what the previous generations have dug. Men have been dismantled and put away. But do these trials and these conflicts mean that God has abandoned his servants, that he's removed his blessing from them?

Not at all. It's the very opposite we're told here. The Lord blessed them, says verse 12. Reiterates it again wonderfully in verse 24. But as so often in the life of faith, it's God's great blessings that bring the great trials and conflicts.

Remember Paul in 1 Corinthians 16, a wide and effective door for gospel work has opened unto me and there are many adversaries. That's exactly what we're seeing here.

[31 : 48] And yet in the midst of it, notice that there are times of relief. At last, verse 22, there's a well without quarreling and a breathing space. He calls it Rehovoth because the Lord has made room, has made space, has brought relief is what the word means.

And so once again, he can see in that moment of respite the promise of God, we will be fruitful in the land despite all. That too is so familiar, isn't it?

Sometimes in the life of faith it does just seem to be a constant round of digging just to keep your head above water. I was talking to a friend in ministry just the other day and we were saying to each other, will things ever be normal again?

You ask yourself that question. Well, in one sense the answer is no because this is the normal Christian life. But God does provide.

He provides Rehoboth, space, times of relief, just enough so we can see again his wonderful promise for us and for our families.

[32 : 56] He knows that we need that because he remembers that we're dust even though sometimes we forget. Just as Moses reminded his people constantly of the land and the rest that lay ahead of them when God would enlarge their territories, when he would give them room, same words.

So he reminds us that at last there will be room, space, relief from all of these things. There is a rest that remains for the people of God. But he also gives us foretaste doesn't he in his grace even now in times of refreshment, times of relief, space from the relentless digging in the face of opposition without and opposition within.

He isn't a blessing that he gives us every single week and the rest of the Lord's day, a Rehoboth. Surely it should be for us as we receive the blessing with gladness.

We should let it be relief and respite to restore us week by week, shouldn't we? Turning us again to the great promise we shall be fruitful in the land. I'm sure you can think of many times too in your own life when in the midst of battle God has given you a special provision, a relief, some space, some room when you've been hemmed in by all the pressures of life like the psalmist in verse 31 who says, Lord, you've delivered me from the hand of the enemy.

You've set my feet in a broad place, a space. You've given me room, relief, Rehoboth. Wouldn't be a bad thing, would it, for us as Christians to keep a Rehoboth diary, to remind us of God's provisions in the past in times of stress, to remind us that we can still count on him today, to provide us with the relief that we need in the midst of foes, to remind us that we'll still be fruitful in the kingdom, however hard the digging may seem.

[34 : 52] Then finally look at verses 23 to 33, which reminds us that God still brings peace through his ordinary servants. Isaac is a foreigner, just like Abraham, but God still brings peace.

The Lord does bring recognition and response from surrounding pagans through the witness of his lesser servants, his ordinary servants, just as he does through those with great spiritual callings.

It was back in chapter 21 at the time of Isaac's birth that the previous Abimelech came to Abraham and said, God is with you in all you do. And he wanted to make a peace treaty with this man who was so clearly a friend of Almighty God.

And it was in this same place also, Beersheba, the well of the oaths, the place that Abraham had called upon El Olam, the everlasting God. The pagan world could see that the everlasting God was with this man.

It recognized it and it responded. And what an encouragement then that here too, after all the relentless slog, the conflicts, the digging and the digging, that Abimelech could clearly see the same thing was true of Isaac.

[36 : 05] Isaac probably thought the Philistines meant him nothing but hostility in verse 27. And they came, you hate me, you want rid of me. Well, there was hostility and yet he was represented, wasn't he, because of what he represented, the promise of God and the Christ of God and the seed who was to come, who was to be a great threat to every pagan nation.

And just as that Christ, when he came, Jesus himself said his people would be reviled on his account. And yet, at the same time, paradoxically, Jesus went right on to say in Matthew 5, that nevertheless, this people are the light of the world, and that that light will shine to lead others gladly to the praise of God our Heavenly Father.

And again, that is exactly what we're seeing here. Despite the hostility, verse 28, we see plainly that the Lord is with you. despite all Isaac's faults, which Abimelech of all the people in the earth knew precisely and very well.

But he saw something real in him, nevertheless, verse 29, you are now the blessed of the Lord. God had reminded Isaac of his own covenant just when he arrived in Beershevan, verse 23, in these wonderful words, fear not, I am the God of Abraham, your father, I am with you and I will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant's sake.

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

[37 : 53] He had provision, a well dug to sustain life. He had all the blessings needed to live in peace in this world. But God had also promised real peace through him.

You will be a blessing, he said. Fruitfulness in the land was not just for him, but it was to be through him to others. Now Abraham, the great prophet of God, the great priest of God, had interceded for pagan nations.

He had brought blessing to Abimelech the king and to a pagan people. But so would Isaac, his lesser son. despite all his fears and failings, even in the sight of these people.

Despite all the slog and the conflict and the frustrations among these people. Did Isaac think that perhaps God had abandoned him and the blessing and the promise had been revoked because of all of his disasters, because of all this relentless opposition?

That is what we often think, isn't it? When things are hard in life and when we're living in the aftermath of mess-ups and sins that we've made, we think, don't we, God has abandoned us and that's why life is so hard.

[39 : 06] But no, says the Lord to Isaac, he makes it clear, his promise remains, not because of Isaac's status or Isaac's preeminence or Isaac's performance, but because God's presence is still with him.

That's what makes somebody a source of blessing to the world. God, if he is there with us, no matter what our inadequacies are, he will be sensed, he'll be felt, he'll be seen, his voice will be heard.

It's having God with you that's what matters. Whether you're one of the great ones like Abraham or Moses, whether you're just ordinary servants of God like the Israelites under Moses. Read Joshua chapter 2, that was what Rahab, the pagan prostitute, saw in Jericho.

God is with you, she said. I know I have to find peace among you. Or later on, the Gibeonites come and they say the same thing. They saw that this people, with all their faults, this people had God with them.

We see plainly, verse 28, that the Lord has been with you. Doesn't that encourage you as you think about your own life and witness? your friends and your family, they know your faults, don't they?

[40 : 20] They know them very well. But if the Lord is with you, you won't be able to help sensing that too. And God can and God does and God still does bring peace to unbelieving people through very ordinary servants.

because he is with them. It's his promise, isn't it? Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations and lo, I will be with you always.

We are, as Peter tells us in the New Testament, we are foreigners, sojourners, aliens among the Gentiles, but Peter says people will see something in our lives that can lead them to give glory to God themselves.

Through ordinary servants, through ordinary churches, God is with us, even through an ordinary church meeting just like this.

That's what Paul says to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 14 verse 25, if God's in the midst, if he is present because his word is being spoken, then complete outsiders will come to know that presence.

[41 : 33] They'll fall down on their faces in worship and say, surely God is among you. just like here with this pagan king, through Isaac, the one chapter man, the guy who lived in the shadow of his father and of his sons all his life, because God was the same, the God who comes to hard pressed, ordinary servants and says, fear not, I am with you.

I will bless you. I will make you fruitful in the earth. faith. Aren't you glad that Abraham's God, the everlasting God, is the God of people like Isaac too?

God who cares about struggling servants, a God who reminds them that despite all of that, he is with us, no matter how beleaguered we feel, that tells us that we will be fruitful and that there will be peace found with God even through people like us.

None of us are 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. We are much, much more like Isaac, aren't we?

Our lives of faith do bear a familiar pattern to many of God's servants that we do read about in the Bible or that we do read about in biographies of the great Christian ones. They're on just a much smaller, more ordinary scale, aren't they?

[43 : 04] But we do have the same God. He's still present in the midst of your particular famines. He still protects despite all our fears and our faithlessness and our foolishness.

He still provides in the midst of all the ongoing slog and struggles and conflicts of the life of faith. And he will still bring peace, peace with contentment in our walk with him and peace through us as others see even in us.

However feeble our faith may be, see in us something that leads them to the glory of God our Father. His presence is so powerful.

It's the only thing that really matters. It's the everlasting God, the God of Abraham, who has promised that he will be with every single ordinary servant of his who loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you love me, says Jesus, I will not leave you. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.

[44 : 28] him. That's how comprehensive covenant promise is to every ordinary believer through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Lord, how we thank you for your promise which spans the generations and reaches to the very depths that your everlasting arms might encompass even such as us and promise to bear us on the way everlasting until the day of your great glory.

So turn our eyes, we pray, to you, our great sovereign protector, and give us heart this day, we ask. In Jesus' name, Amen.