

The Blessing Continues Despite Our Folly

Genesis 26:6-11

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Introduction:

Last week in our Genesis sermon series, we came to chapter 26.

- At first, it almost looks like a misplaced chapter—the way it interrupts the story of Jacob and Esau that began in chapter 25 and continues in chapter 27...

But we saw that this chapter is in fact deliberately placed here to draw our attention to the fact that Isaac stands in the same covenant relationship with God that his father Abraham did.

- This chapter is an encouragement from our LORD that all who are redeemed stand in the same covenant relationship with Him as Abraham.

We saw that there is a plethora of deliberate parallels that are drawn between Isaac and his father...

- Isaac faces a famine, just as his father did.
- Isaac was given covenant commands and promises, like his father
- Isaac was told where God wanted him to go, like his father
- Isaac lied about his wife because of fear, exactly like his father
- Isaac was rebuked for his lie, like his father was
- Isaac was blessed with riches, just like his father
- Isaac's riches brought strife, just as his father's riches did
- Isaac was visited by God to assure him of protection, just as his father was
- Isaac worshipped the LORD in response to God's appearing to him, just as his father did
- Isaac was acknowledged by Abimelech as "blessed of God," just as his father was.
- Isaac even named the place where water was found and where he made a covenant with Abimelech *Beersheba*, just as his father had before.

This pattern is given to highlight the fact that God's covenant blessing continues from generation to generation.

- I told you that I intended to preach three sermons from this chapter in order to show you this truth.
- Last week, we looked at how the covenant blessing continues through the covenant faithfulness of both God and His people...
 - We looked at verses 1-5 where the LORD renews His covenant promises with Isaac—the same promises that He had given to Abraham...
 - which we saw are essentially the same promises He gives to us today in Christ.
- This week, I want to show you from verses 6-11 how the covenant blessing continues even when we, as His covenant people, give way to our fears.
 - This may seem like a contradiction in a way to what we saw last week—for if we must continue in covenant faithfulness, how is it that a feature of God's dealing with us is that He continues even when we sin?
 - You must remember what we saw last week about the obedience in which we continue—it is not an obedience of perfection, but an ongoing response to God's call in the gospel.
 - We are not talking about a complete apostasy, but a temporary lapse in our faith such as David's adultery, Peter's denial, or John Mark's defection in service.

- And then next week, LORD willing, we will look at how the blessing continues through persecutions.

You can see how all three of these are important for God's people to know...

- Life in God's covenant of grace means that we continue in His grace, that He chastens us when we lapse, and that we can expect persecution.

For our scripture reading, I will include the verses we focused on last week—verses 1-5, and of course the verses that we are looking at this week—verses 6-11...

- So I will begin in Genesis 26 verse 1.
- Here is the Word of our faithful God that abides forever:

Genesis 26:1-11: There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. ² Then the LORD appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵ because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." ⁶ So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. ⁷ And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, "She is my

sister"; for he was afraid to say, "She is my wife," because he thought, "lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold." ⁸ Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife. ⁹ Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, 'She is my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'" ¹⁰ And Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us." ¹¹ So Abimelech charged all his people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

As we survey verses 6-11,

- We see that Isaac was faithful to obey his Lord and stay at Gerar where the Philistines lived instead of going down to Egypt.
 - Isaac was, overall, a faithful man who kept God's covenant, obeying the call of the gospel to follow the Lord for salvation.
- But we see here how the same fear that caused his father Abraham to stumble also caused Isaac to stumble by taking refuge in lies.
 - Like his father, he feared that on account of the beauty of his wife, the men of Gerar would kill him that they might take her for themselves.
 - This was not entirely unreasonable as men in those days would often attack their neighbours (even as they still do) to obtain wealth or power, and part of the wealth they took were their wives and servants...
 - And Isaac supposed that on account of the incredible beauty of Rebekah, they would kill him that they might take her.

- But for a servant of God who was under God's protection to fear and take refuge in lies was an affront to the Lord.
- I will have more to say about this later, but I want to begin by showing you that...

I. Isaac had every reason to trust in the LORD, just as you do.

A. As we saw last week, by renewing the same promises made to Abraham with Isaac, God shows that His promises continue from generation to generation.

1. In pure grace, He came to Isaac to reassure him of His promised blessing.
 - He came to him when the promise of the kingdom coming through Isaac's seed seemed to be endangered...
 - Not only was Rebekah barren, but also there was a famine that threatened the very existence of Isaac's household.
 - It was at this time of struggle and potential doubting that God graciously came to Isaac to renew His covenant promises, just as He had done so many times with Abraham.
 - By doing this, the Lord was showing Isaac as well as us that His covenant blessing continues to each new generation of those He redeems.
 - Our Lord delights in assuring us that His promises still stand.
 - He has appointed His word to be read and the gospel to be preached each Lord's Day in the church, and each day in our homes.
 - He has appointed the sacraments of baptism and of the Lord's Supper in our day to assure each one of us that His covenant promise still stands and that He is fully committed to it.
 - He has admonished us to encourage one another in the gospel.
 - And over and over in redemptive history, the same essential promises are renewed.
 2. We looked at verses 3-5 and considered what those essential promises are which we still have in Christ today.
 - a. There is the promise that says: **I will be with you (v. 3)**; showing us that we can have communion with Him forever.
 - b. The promise that says: **I will bless you (v. 3)**; showing that even though we are sinners, the LORD will do all that is required to secure our eternal happiness.
 - c. The promise to bless our descendants along with us if we and they continue in His covenant (v. 3).
 - d. The promise that He will give us an everlasting inheritance (v.3)...which was later expanded to a promise that we will inherit the earth!
 - e. The promise that we (as God's people) will multiply as the stars of heaven (v. 4)—the earth will at last be filled with godly people!
 - f. The promised that in Abraham's seed, all the nations will be blessed, that our Lord will atone for sin, purge our corruption, and overthrow Satan.
- These are the things that God has promised to do.

TRANS> When He makes promises like this to us, we have every reason to trust Him.

- He is the LORD and does not make empty promises.
 - Our trust is shown in every generation by obeying the call of the gospel;
 - the call to come to Him, putting ourselves in His faithful hands, that we might be saved by Him to be His people forever.
 - That is how we continue in His covenant.
- B. And we also have reason to trust Him because of His faithful record in always keeping His promises.
1. Isaac could look back and see God's faithfulness to Abraham.
 - a. He could see how the LORD fulfilled His promises when they looked impossible to fulfill (and were impossible by our own power)—as with his own birth when his mother was menopausal...
 - He could see how able the LORD was to do what He had promised...
 - b. And he could look back and see how committed the LORD was to His promise—how even Abraham's folly could not overthrow the promise.
 2. And now from our vantage point, we have an even greater record of God's faithfulness!
 - a. Talk about His ability to keep His promise!
 - We have seen how He has marvellously, miraculously preserved His people through all of these ages!
 - There have been so many times—even in the day when Christ came—that it has looked like the church would be wiped out...
 - but again and again God has preserved her...
 - b. And talk about commitment!
 - By the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, to die on the cross, we can see to what lengths the LORD has gone to take away our sins!
 - If He did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up for us in fulfilment of His promise to bless us,
 - we have every reason to trust in Him today.

TRANS> And because we, like Isaac, have every reason to trust Him,

II. It is very shameful for us to give way to our fears like Isaac does here...

- **imitating his father Abraham in a way that he should not be imitated!**

A. Fear can be the occasion of taking matters into our own hands!

1. You see here how Isaac takes refuge in lies, just as his father had done.
 - a. Both Abraham and Isaac had beautiful wives...this is not just their opinion, but the testimony of scripture!
 - And with Abraham we saw how he had made it a policy whenever they went to a new place for them to tell everyone that Sarah his wife was his sister.
 - This was not an all-out lie because she was his half-sister—the Lord had not prohibited such connections at this time—
 - but it was a deception because the more significant relationship was that she was his wife.

- b. Well here you see that Isaac, sharing his father's fear resorts to his father's deception and tells the men of Gerar that Rebekah is his sister.
 - Verse 7 says: **And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, "She is my sister"; for he was afraid to say, "She is my wife," because he thought, "lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold."**
 - And so you see, this lie was the way that Isaac sought to protect himself—he lied because he was afraid.
2. And I tell you, it is easy to take matters into your own hands like this when you are afraid.
- a. Very often, we lie or deceive because we want people to think better of us than what we really are.
 - We are afraid that we won't be hired, so we lie about our credentials...
 - We are afraid we won't make a sale, so we lie about our product...
 - We are afraid of getting in trouble, so we lie about what we have done...
 - b. There is even a temptation to lie the way Peter did...when someone says,
 - "You are not one of those *Christians*, are you?"
 - Or, they say "You don't believe that women should be told what do with their own bodies, do you?"
 - c. And there are other ways that we take matters into our own hands when we are afraid...
 - We are some of the richest people that have ever lived on the earth, but there are many Christians who do not tithe with a true ten per cent of their income to the Lord.
 - Why not?
 - Because they are afraid that they won't have enough if they do that—and of course really it is more a matter of covetousness...they are afraid that they cannot be happy if they obey God in this matter.
3. And this fear that we will not be happy unless we sin or lie is really what is at the heart of pretty much all of our sins...
- Essentially, you decide in your deceived heart that obeying God is not the way to happiness for you in this matter...
 - you come to think that doing His will and leaving it to Him to decide the outcome is not in your best interests,
 - so you take matters into your own hands and break his commandments to avoid what seems an unhappy pathway.
 - I do not mean to say that we may not try to avoid trouble—
 - The problem is when we disobey God's revealed will in our efforts to avoid trouble or to gain what we want.
 - God has sent us lean times, so we seek to soften them by withholding our tithe.
 - We want a job, so we lie at the interview to get it.
 - We are angry, so we resort to malicious gossip or violence.

B. I hope you can see what a great insult this is to your faithful LORD!

1. By taking matters into your own hands,
 - you are essentially saying that He either does not know what is best for you...
 - does not care about what is best for you...
 - is impotent and unable to work things out so that you must take the matter into your own hands...
 - or that He is cruel and out to hurt you!
 - That is so wrong—and so disrespectful to Him!
 - Here is the Lord who made the world, the God of all wisdom and truth, the God who did not spare His Son for you...
 - And you are saying that it is not safe to follow Him?
 - That you have to take matters into your own hands because if you leave it in His hands, it will all go wrong?
 - That unless you lie about your wife and say she is your sister, you will die, even when the future kingdom depends upon you living?
 - Do you see how obnoxious that is?
2. Do you not have a Father in heaven who loves you?
 - Then why are you afraid at all?
 - Why don't you give your fears to Him?
 - Why are you acting like a spiritual orphan who has no heavenly Father to call on? no heavenly Father who is looking out for you?
 - Are you not like Israel in the wilderness when they kept complaining to Moses that they would die in the wilderness? that they could not conquer Canaan? that they had no way to obtain food and water?
 - Instead of looking to the Lord, they gave way to fear!

TRANS> That is the heart of this sin—you show contempt for God whom you ought to fully trust—even when He calls you to suffer for His sake.

- If doing his will means deprivation or death, then let it be so!
- He loves you and He is not out to harm you—not at all—even if following Him means that you do die.
 - It is for you to trust Him.

C. There are also many additional offences and aggravations that arise from this sin.

1. For Isaac, out of this doubt came his lies...
 - God is a God of truth and He wants us to be a people who tell the truth.
 - We do not have to disclose everything—especially to our enemies—but we should not lie to them.
 - In warfare or even in sports, we can pretend that we are going one way when we are really going the other way, but that is not to tell a lie.
 - But when we speak, people need to know that they can absolutely trust us if we are Christians.
 - Our word should be as good as gold.

2. There is also the sin for Isaac of putting his wife Rebekah in harm's way by his deception...
 - As Abimelech says to him—one of the men might have taken her.
 - A husband is responsible to protect his wife—he should stand in front of her rather than making her a shield for himself!
 - This is so opposite to what Jesus did—
 - Jesus came to take blows that in all justice belonged to us!
 - He said, “Punish Me for their offenses!”
 - Men are to love their wives like that...
3. Isaac is also guilty of not learning from history in this matter.
 - That is what we call an *aggravation* to his sin—something that makes it worse.
 - a. Abraham had done the same thing twice, and both times he ended up being rebuked for it...
 - How could Isaac have missed this?
 - Why does he follow his father in this matter that has proven to be unnecessary, shameful, and displeasing to God?
 - b. Well perhaps I can answer that question with a question—why do you imitate your parents in their wrongs?
 - Like Isaac, you imitate some of their virtues, but why do you imitate their sins?
 - It is so foolish, but it happens all the time—
 - There are things you see in them that are very ugly—turning to the bottle—manipulating speech—outburst of anger—negligence...
 - whatever—and then you end up doing these things yourself!
 - One of the most vivid illustrations I have of this is of twelve year old girl I warned about the direction she was going...
 - She had a very foolish mother who drank and slept around with one man after another.
 - This girl was doing some foolish things too, but she said that she would never do those things that her mom was doing...
 - Now she is doing those very same things—and more.
 - The thing is, God made us to be imitators, especially of our parents.
 - and I guess we find some comfort and some security in doing so...
 - but far from being an excuse for our sin, it is an aggravation of it that we did not learn from their folly to take a different path.
 - c. It seems that Abimelech actually does learn from history, better than Isaac.
 - Abimelech remembers that when his father or grandfather had taken Sarah with plans to make her his wife,
 - God had visited the whole kingdom with His wrath...
 - In verse 10 he says, **“One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us.”**
 - This statement shows that he remembers that even though Sarah had been taken in innocence, it still brought guilt on them.

- So the younger Abimelech does not repeat the same folly of his father the way Isaac repeated the sin of his father.
 - And this brings us to the next aggravation of Isaac’s sin...
- 4. Isaac’s sin was aggravated because he set a bad example before Abimelech and all the Philistines.
 - As God’s people, we represent Him to our neighbours in the world!
 - If are fearful and deceptive, we show them what we think of our God!
 - That He is not able or not willing to care for us.
 - If we are always complaining, or if we are expressing our fear about the way the election went or about our enemies...
 - What are we saying about our God?
 - Christians on the internet freaking out about whatever are a reproach to the Lord.
 - Far better it is to be like Jonathan when his father Saul was trembling before the Philistines and Jonathan, with on his armour bearer, said:
 - **1Sa 14:6: “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few.”**
- 5. Isaac’s sin was still further aggravated by the fact that he set a bad example for his own posterity.
 - Just as he followed Abraham’s bad example, now he is setting it up for his posterity to follow his bad example...
 - Fathers are responsible to set a good example for their offspring!
 - And indeed, this sin is imitated and becomes worse in his son Jacob who ends up deceiving Isaac himself...
 - He deceives him in his effort to secure the birthright that was promised to him—as if he has to do this to get the blessing.
 - This sin of taking matters into his own hands becomes a dominate characteristic of Jacob’s life that the LORD has to purge from him over the years.
 - And then with Jacob’s sons, the sin becomes even more offensive when his sons resort to murder and deception to get rid of Joseph.
 - Unless you want to set your children up for trouble, commit yourself to the Lord’s will, even when it seems dangerous or difficult.
 - Many parents weep today when they see that their sins have become the occasion of their children’s apostasy!

TRANS> So you see that there are many aggravations to Isaac’s sin, especially in that he followed his father’s bad example when God had provided such a helpful lesson through it...

- but again, the worst thing of all is that we treat God as if He cannot be trusted—that we will be harmed if we obey Him and do what He has said!
- But now I want to move on to a much happier subject...

III. See here that despite your shameful distrust, the LORD still delivers you!

- The pattern of the covenant is that when we are unfaithful, God is still faithful.

A. See how the LORD graciously rescues Isaac, even as He rescued Abraham.

1. In setting this before us, Genesis 26 shows us the pattern by which He operates!
 - Remember that this whole chapter is laid out to show us how God deals with His people
 - And here He shows us that He delivers us even when we do not trust Him as we should—when our faith falters and our obedience wanes.
2. Look at what He does to rescue His people as seen in how He rescues Isaac—it is a gracious kindness!
 - a. You see that He exposes our sin for what it is...He uses Abimelech to expose Isaac.
 - In His gracious providence, He brings it about that Isaac is sporting with his wife (the word is actually akin to his name—remember that his name means laughter—he was *Isaacing* his wife)...
 - And he is doing it in a way that would only be appropriate for a husband to do with his wife...
 - And just at that time, Abimelech looks through a window and sees it...
 - Verse 8 says: **Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife.**
 - I think Abimelech was very likely suspicious of Isaac and was watching for this...
 - It is unclear from the original if he looked out his own window in through Isaac's window,
 - but you get the impression that he was watching Isaac because he knew what had happened before with Abraham when Abraham had said that Sarah was his sister!
 - The consequences had made quite an impression on King Abimelech and so he was wary of Abraham's son—
 - And his suspicions proved to be well founded.
 - b. You see how he comes immediately to confront Isaac.
 - 1) Look at verse 9-10: **Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, 'She is my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'"** ¹⁰ **And Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us."**
 - Doesn't it look like Abimelech was expecting to discover this?
 - His suspicions and his fear of God protected him from doing anything that was at all blameworthy...
 - And so you have this pagan king rebuking God's servant...
 - And this time, from a position of moral supremacy and excellence!

- 2) And again, this is God's way of rebuking Isaac—a very powerful way!
 - This has more potential for humbling Isaac than if God had spoken directly to him!
 - Here these people that he thought so little of as to think that they would kill him for his wife prove to be more righteous than he is!
 - Isaac was willing to risk his wife's purity but Abimelech acted with great caution in the fear of God.
 - 3) Ouch! Sometimes the Lord's rebukes can be very sharp—because they need to be!
 - If you are taking some matter into your own hands, the time will come when the LORD will deal with you!
 - It may be very painful when he does—because it needs to be!
- c. But you see that God still protects Isaac from his own folly!
- Once again, He uses Abimelech to do it!
 - Abimelech decrees that anyone who messes with Isaac or with Rebekah will be killed!
 - Verse 11 says: **So Abimelech charged all his people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."**
 - This all came about because God had stepped in to protect Sarah from the older Abimelech in the previous generation when he had tried to take her as his wife.
 - The LORD had somehow afflicted his entire kingdom, and Abimelech does not want this to happen again.
 - So through His providence, God provides much better protection for Isaac and Rebekah than Isaac's refuge in lies.
3. How kind the LORD is to not just leave us to our own ways!
 - a. His gracious rebuke chases us down and tackles us to rescue us.
 - It comes to us when we do not trust His way and try to establish a different way for ourselves—by sin, by lies, by whatever.
 - It is a very gracious thing the way He exposes Isaac and rebukes him.
 - It is that he might be delivered and kept from destroying the kingdom!
 - When God exposes sin and rebukes it, it is a great kindness on His part.
 - b. What if the LORD did not do this?
 - 1) What if He had left Isaac and someone had taken Rebekah to be his own wife...
 - then Jacob could not have been born and if Jacob had not been born, there would have been no Judah and no David and no Jesus Christ the Son of David.
 - 2) What if He had left the church of the old covenant in their idolatry during the period of the judges,
 - or what if He had not sent the Assyrians and the Babylonians to deal with the idolatry in the kingdom of years and raised up faithful prophets like Elijah and Isaiah and Jeremiah?

- or what if He had not raised up the Reformers to rebuke the church for their idolatry at the time of the Reformation.

3) And what about in your own life...

- What are some of the sins that He has rescued you from?
 - Perhaps there was a time when you were not tithing...that you supposed God's way would make you miserable...
 - Perhaps there was a time when you looked to sexual immorality to make your life full...
 - Perhaps you indulged in anger or deception or gossip and the Lord called you on it...
 - Perhaps it was that you were selfish as a parent and were not nurturing your children as you should—indulging them or being harsh with them or whatever...
 - and the Lord called you on it.
 - He has certainly arrested me and rebuked me for my parenting at various times—bringing forth noxious fruit that drove me to my knees...

➤ How kind He is to not just leave us to our own ways!

c. God shows here, by dealing with Isaac for the same sin that He had had to deal with his father about,

- that He is committed to him in the same way He was committed to Abraham.
 - That if we are His sons, He will chasten us and He will deliver us.
- It is part of His covenant promise that He will rebuke us, just as He said to David years later...
 - **Psalm 89:30-33: If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, if they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.**

B. This being so, we have all the more reason to trust Him!

1. If our LORD delivers us even when we make matters worse by our own folly, how much more will He deliver us if we commit ourselves to Him?

- Both Isaac and Abraham actually put themselves (and the covenant) in much greater danger by their fearful attempts to make it secure than it would have been in if they had done nothing!
 - It was not because of what they did that their wives were spared so that the covenant promise could be fulfilled, but despite what they had done!
- In other words, God performed a greater work in delivering them and their households when they had lied than He would have had to perform if they had simply trusted Him and told the truth!
 - Where sin abounded, grace abounded even more!

2. There is no need to take matters into your own hands!
 - Things are perfectly safe with the LORD...much safer in fact.
 - The safest place for you, the simplest place for you, is in trusting obedience to His will—
 - Just do what He calls you to do and leave the rest to Him!
3. It is a funny thing, but you desperately need His grace to do that.
 - So what do you need to be delivered from? What matters have you taken into your own hands?
 - You know what they are and you need to turn to God right now in humble obedient repentance if He has rebuked you.
 - And what will come up in the future that you will need to be delivered from?
 - You do not know—but God knows...
 - And what you need to do now is to pray earnestly, not only that the LORD will deliver you if should fall, but also that He will keep you from falling in the first place!
 - How much better it would have been if Isaac had never given in to his fears and resorted to lies to save himself...
 - The Lord is a much better Saviour for him and for you.
 - Ask Him for the grace to help you trust in Him whenever you are afraid and start to doubt His goodness.