

11.8.24 pm

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Date: 11 August 2024

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening. A warm welcome to the service this evening. Just one notice that I failed to get out this morning to take note of this evening.

I will carry it over to next week as well. I hadn't taken a proper note that the Leverborough communion, the South Harris communion, runs from Friday through till Sunday of next week.

So the services will be on these days. And usually we would close on Sunday night to give the opportunity to go over to the service and then to go to the fellowship.

And we'll do that once more. So next Sunday we'll have the morning service as usual. Evening service will join with Leverborough. So please take note of that.

We'll begin this time of worship and we'll sing to God's praise. The first two stanzas, the first three verses as they're marked in the English of Psalm 139.

[1 : 00] We have this promise which is repeated this evening in Genesis 26 of God speaking to Isaac saying that he will be with him.

And this is a psalm that gives us the encouragement and also the challenge of knowing that God is with us. He knows us. He is always over us.

O Lord, thou hast me searched and known. Thou knowest my sitting down and rising up. Yea, all my thoughts afar to thee are known. My footsteps and my lying down.

Thou compasses always. Thou also most entirely art acquainted with all my ways. We'll sing these two stanzas of Psalm 139 in Gaelic.

We'll remain seated to sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

[2 : 24] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[4 : 54] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[7 : 24] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[9 : 54] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Amen.

Thank you.

[12 : 24] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[14 : 54] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[17 : 24] 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 are. So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the valley of Gerar. And settled there.

And Isaac dug up again the wells of water that had been dug up 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 him.

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 Ishk because they contended with him. Then they dug another well and they quarreled over that also. So he called its name Sitna.

[18 : 31] 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 I 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 Ahuzai, his advisor, and Philistai, the commander of his army, Isaac said to them, 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 he 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 to you nothing but good and have 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 oats. And Isaac sent them on their way and they departed from him in peace.

[20 : 00] That same day Isaac's servants came and told them about the well that they had dug and said to them, we have found water. He called it Sheba. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We're going to sing again to God's praise this time. We're singing in the hymn book, hymn 122, a prayer as we come back to God's word.

Come Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire. Let us thine influence prove. Source of the old prophetic fire, fountain of life and love. Come Holy Ghost, for moved by thee the prophets wrote and spoke.

Unlock the truth, thyself the key, and seal the sacred book. We'll sing the whole of this hymn to God's grace. NINGNINGNINGNING Freted fire, the dead of life and love.

Come, Holy Ghost, formed moved by thee, the prophet's road has formed.

[21 : 43] Unlock the truth, thyself the key, and seal the sacred moon.

Expand thy wings, celestial dove, through door and nature's light.

All our disorder spirits prove, and let them love divine.

God through himself we then shall know, if thou within us shine, and stand with all thy saints below, the depths of love divine.

Let's pray for a moment as we come back to the word.

[23 : 01] Heavenly Father, again, we thank you for the prayer that we have sung, and we would echo these words from so many years ago. We ask that you would unlock the book, that you would show us the truths, the eternal truths that we need to see.

We pray that you would unblock our ears. We pray that you would take away from our eyes all that would distract us. And we ask that we would know your presence, and that we would hear your voice.

We pray, Lord, that we would come to know you, the God who is almighty, the God who is all-powerful, the eternal God.

We pray that as we listen in to this story, this historical account from so many years ago, we ask, Lord, that you would reveal to us more of your character, and your beauty.

And we pray that you would reveal to us also the depth of our need of you. We thank you that although you are the eternal God, and the sovereign God, the all-powerful God, you are the God who deals with us personally.

[24 : 20] We saw that this morning, and we see that this evening also, a promise that is given to Abraham, that passes down the family line.

We hear God speaking to this man, Isaac, this ordinary man in so many ways. And yet we thank you that he heard your voice, that he received your promise.

And we thank you that your promises are trustworthy. And we see that promise fulfilled through the years, through the generations. And we experience even something of the blessing of that promise this evening, as we come in the name of the one who was promised, the name of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

So hear our prayers, and guide us and lead us. Speak to our hearts, we pray. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Genesis 26, if you could have that open in front of you.

We're just going to step through the verses of this account this evening. Amen. These days we're more probably accustomed to watching films than we are perhaps reading books.

[25 : 46] And one of the techniques that's used often in films today is, I don't know what the technical phrase is, but it'd be like the flashback technique. The film begins, and we start to get to know the main character in the film.

And we see the main character in the present tense, going through whatever it is he or she is going through. But then as the film continues, and as the plot unfolds, very often as we get to know the character more, we're taken back in time.

And there are these flashbacks to earlier periods in the life of the main character, which help us to get to know something of the background, the context, the reason why this person is the way that he or she is.

And that's a technique which we see actually in Genesis 26. The main character, as I said in this chapter, is Isaac.

It's the only chapter in the Bible that is devoted to Isaac. And as Genesis 25 finishes, we see Isaac and Rebecca.

[27 : 06] And as we thought about last Sunday evening, they're going through the highs and lows of living by faith. But now in Genesis 26, we're taken back in time.

So the writer rewinds to an earlier period in Isaac and Rebecca's life and takes us back to a time where they're married, but they don't at this point have any children.

And what we see in this account, as we zoom in on Isaac, is that many of the experiences that Isaac's father Abraham had, they seem to continue.

And there are parallels. There are almost repeat accounts of what Isaac experiences that his father also had lived through.

So we see much of the same as we come into Genesis 26 and as we reflect back on Abraham's experience in the previous chapters.

[28 : 22] The first thing we see tonight is the same problems. The same problems are experienced by Isaac that his father Abraham had gone through.

Genesis chapter 12 is one of the key passages in Genesis. And in Genesis 12, we have Abraham's call. Abraham is getting on with his life.

He has no word of God. He has no thought of God. But God comes to Abraham. And God calls Abraham, who was a pagan, to leave his country and to leave his people and to leave everything that was familiar and to follow God to the place that he would lead.

And God in Genesis 12 promises Abraham family and land and blessings. And so Abraham, he heard the voice, he heard the call and he follows, he goes the way of faith.

But as Abraham travels, as he responds to the call of God, he experiences problems along the way. And now as we see Isaac, Abraham's son, he is continuing on the way of faith.

[29 : 45] But there were problems along the way. They're experiencing the same kind of problems. Verse 1, Now there was a famine in the land.

And then the writer connects the dots for us here. There was a famine in the land besides the previous famine in Abraham's time. So Abraham, back in Genesis 12, as he's seeking to follow the Lord, he suffered hard times.

When food was scarce and they were going through famine. And now Isaac, he's in a land, in the place that God had called him to be. But there was a famine.

There was problems. Still verse 1, And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. So Isaac is experiencing problems.

He's not sure what is going to be available to eat as he thinks about the next week and the next few months and the time ahead. And he makes the decision to leave Canaan.

[31 : 00] And he heads in the direction of Gerar. We're not told why Isaac went in that direction. The scholars, the commentators, they speculate that Isaac was actually heading in the direction of Egypt.

Egypt. And so this stop in Gerar, the commentators think, was likely just an overnight stay. You know, to put it in our terms, he's headed for Egypt but he phones on ahead and he makes a reservation for the Gerar travel lodge.

He's just going to stop there for a night or two. He's en route to Egypt. Perhaps he's following his father Abraham in the same direction, the commentators think, and it seems plausible. But at this point in Isaac's experience, the Lord breaks in and he appears to Isaac.

Verse 2. The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, do not go down to Egypt. So, that would make pretty clear to us that Isaac was planning on heading down in the direction of Egypt.

The Lord knows him, he knows his thoughts, he knows his travel plans. And the Lord says to Isaac, do not go down to Egypt, live in the land where I tell you to live, stay in this land for a while.

[32 : 23] And so, Isaac has to hear and consider his response to this word that comes from God.

but already what we're seeing is that life was not straightforward, it wasn't easy, it wasn't smooth, it wasn't playing sailings in the way of faith.

Abraham experienced problems, famines, Isaac now is experiencing the same kind of problems. and this is a point in application which will be repeated over and over again in this story but it's repeated for emphasis because we need to get this, we need to keep on hearing this.

And the lesson is God's people when we are seeking to live his way in this world, we will experience difficulties.

difficulties. The way of faith is not easy. There can be seasons where things seem to be smooth but the way of faith is not easy.

[33 : 44] So it shouldn't surprise us, it shouldn't take us off track when we experience problems.

One commentator Baldwin says it is no vain thing to trust the Lord but faith demands much patience. This lesson needs to be presented to young Christians, young Christians in particular.

I can just hit pause for a second. Those who are young, you can decide if you're young or not, and who are Christians, this lesson says Baldwin, needs to be presented to young Christians in a forceful way to prepare them for the tests that are sure to come before long and could unsettle.

Abraham, following God's way, experienced problems. Isaac, continuing in the same way of faith, he experienced problems.

And as we seek to follow God's way, to trust him, to obey him, to walk with him, we at times will experience and face the same kind of problems.

[35 : 10] So we see the parallel, we see the almost repeat of what Abraham experienced and what Isaac was now experiencing. But one thing to note here is Isaac didn't do what Abraham did.

Remember, Abraham, he's experiencing famine and difficulty and he determines he's heading for Egypt. That's where the action was, that's where the economy was booming, that's where there was promise.

So Abraham, he heads for Egypt, but Isaac, he doesn't go to Egypt.

God speaks to him, he hears, he trusts, he obeys. So verse six, Isaac stayed in Gera. And this is speculation, you can take or you can bin it.

but as I was thinking about this and as I was preparing, I can imagine Abraham sitting down with his son Isaac and telling him about the mistake that he made on the day that he decided to go to Egypt.

[36 : 27] I can imagine Abraham sitting down with Isaac and telling him and warning him about all the trouble that followed when he made the unwise decision to go away from the direction that God was calling him and to go his own way.

And I can imagine also Abraham saying to Isaac, his son, and yet in spite of my foolishness, in spite of my sin, in spite of my mistake, I learned so much of the forgiveness and the grace and the patience of God as he took me back on track when I repented and took me back onto the right way.

And that's speculation, I know. But it struck me that this is a lesson that perhaps parents especially can take on board.

The reality is we often get it wrong. Parents. Abraham got it wrong. And we often make mistakes, as Abraham made a mistake.

when we do, let's admit it. Now, let's sit down sometimes with our children and think about the wonder of the fact that we worship a God who can use even our mistakes and our failures and our sin to show to us the wonder of his grace and his glory and the wonder of his plans.

[38 : 34] So we see Abraham and now Isaac, they're experiencing the same problems, and yet in the midst of these problems, God is still at work.

That's the main point to grasp here, first of all. The second thing we see as we move on is that Abraham and Isaac, they hear and they take hold of the same and yet better, an even bigger, an even better promise.

So the second point is the same but an even better promise. So the Lord says to Isaac, stay in gear for a while, in verse 3, he says, I will be with you and will bless you.

For to you and your descendants, I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees, and my instructions.

Now this promise that we have in these verses echoes the promise that God made previously to Abraham.

[39 : 55] It is all the same components of the promise that God made previously to Abraham. The Lord promises land to Abraham and now he's promising land to Isaac.

The Lord promises descendants to Abraham and now he's promising descendants to Isaac. The Lord promises blessing to Abraham. He's now promising blessing to Isaac.

But then there's this glorious add-on in verse 3. And the Lord says to Isaac, I will be with you.

This is the first time in the Bible that God promises personally to be with someone.

Steinman, the commentator, says this is the first time God's promise to be with someone is recorded in Scripture. Dale Ralph Davis adds, and ordinary Isaac receives it.

[41 : 02] and that's worth noting. We have this amazing promise for the first time and yet this promise is given not to a character who is extraordinary and stand out, but it's to ordinary Isaac.

Isaac in comparison to his father Abraham is very ordinary. If you were to glance at Hebrews chapter 11, you don't need to go there just now, you can do it later, but as far as I can see, Isaac just gets the tiniest little mention.

And yet he's mentioned as somebody who's living by faith. And God takes hold of this ordinary man to continue his extraordinary work.

And that's got to be an encouragement for us as ordinary people who are worshipping an extraordinary God.

Sinclair Ferguson said, when the Scotland reformer John Knox was asked to explain how it was that the reformation came about, he, Knox, said, because God gave his Holy Spirit to ordinary men in great abundance.

[42 : 54] And so Isaac is a standout ordinary man. The only thing that we can note about Isaac as a standout thing is just how ordinary he was.

How unremarkable he was, and yet God promised, I will be with you. And that promise was then taken, and it was repeated over and over again to a series of ordinary people throughout Old Testament history.

And with the coming of Jesus into the world, that promise was fulfilled. Because what was the name that Jesus was given?

In promise and in arrival, his name was Emmanuel. Which means what? God with us. And remember when Jesus is ascending into heaven in Matthew 28, what does he say to his disciples?

To them back then, and it resonates all the way to us today, what is he saying? He says, I will be with you. Take the gospel message, take the good news, make disciples, I will be with you always.

[44 : 25] So tonight, this promise that we hear given to Isaac is a promise that is for us.

God promised to be with him, and God promises still to be with us, ordinary people. So very, very practically, take that into next week with you.

I don't know what your diary looks like. Might look like an ordinary week. There might be things in your week which are causing you some level of anxiety.

Things that make you fearful, things that you think are beyond your capability. What a reassurance to know that the God of Abraham and Isaac promises still to be with us.

What an encouragement to know that, to know that when we face scary things, God is with us. God never leaves us.

[45 : 47] He never forsakes us. And there's also the challenge as we go into this new week. When we find ourselves in a place when we are tempted to sin, when we're tempted to go off track, when no one else is watching, when no one else is listening, when no one else will know, let's remember that the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, he is still with us.

Isaac, as he follows in the footsteps of his father Abraham, he's experiencing the same problems, and yet in the midst of all that mess, God is still working.

And Isaac, as he follows in the footsteps of his father Abraham, he experiences also the same but an even bigger, better, promise of God, as he has this encounter with the living God.

And if we step back from this for a minute, and we think about how Isaac must have been feeling, we would expect that Isaac would be just bursting with encouragement.

God has appeared to him, he's given him this huge promise, he's given him this huge reassurance, he's blessed him with his presence. So we would think with that experience and that blessing that Isaac would be, he would be encouraged, he would be spiritually boosted, and yet he would be cautious, he'd be careful, he would be wanting to walk close with and obey the God who was promising to be with him.

[48 : 03] But the reality is that's not what happened. If we were writing the next chapter here, the next section, we would think that the next section would be Isaac encouraged and instructed walk steady.

But that's not what happened. The third point, we probably won't get past this tonight, there's the same mistakes, the same problems that are experienced, the same but better promise that is taken hold of, and the third thing here is the same mistakes.

verse 7. When the men of that place asked him, Isaac, about his wife, he said, she's my sister, because he was afraid to say she's my wife. He thought the men of this place might kill me on account of Rebecca, because she is beautiful.

And we're reading this and we're thinking, this is double déjà vu. Abraham messed up on this account twice, and it seems that Isaac is going down exactly the same road.

How could this happen? But the reality is it did happen. Same mistakes. It's almost a mirror image of what Abraham his father did in Genesis 12 and Genesis 20.

[49 : 27] And you can go back and read that yourselves later. It's actually in some ways worse what Isaac does in this situation than what Abraham did, because Abraham in heading into Egypt and putting his wife in danger, he tells a half truth.

Isaac just tells a bare-faced lie. And so the story continues, verse 8.

When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac. It's got laughing in the ESV here. The updated ESV uses the word caressing and that's what's in the Hebrew.

There's a clear intimacy between husband and wife, which causes Abimelech to realize this is not his sister, this is his wife.

So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, she is really your wife. Why did you say she is my sister? Isaac answered him, because I thought I might lose my life on account of her.

[50 : 36] Then Abimelech said, what is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us. So Abimelech gave orders to all the people, anyone who harms this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

death. So this is like watching a repeat, it's like watching an old rerun, something we've seen twice before. Isaac, like Abraham, is caught out.

He's caught out lying. He is caught out putting his wife at risk. Abraham is following, Isaac is following in the track of his father Abraham because in this situation he puts himself first above everyone and everything, including his wife.

And he does this for a long time, we're told. And eventually it takes an unbeliever to say to him, what are you playing at? How can you be living this way?

Now, the question I want to ask at this point is, what had gone wrong with Isaac? He's done this awful thing.

[52 : 03] So what had gone wrong with Isaac? What had Isaac lost sight of? And the answer to that question is, Isaac had lost sight of the fact that God was with him.

The very thing that God had so forcefully pressed upon him as a blessed promise seems to have gone in one ear and out the other.

And Isaac in this place, Gera, as he puts his wife at risk, he's lost sight of the fact that God was with him.

If he remembered and believed that God was with him, he wouldn't have been so worried about the risk of attack. Because if the God of the universe is with you, why do you have to be so fearful, Isaac?

And if Isaac had remembered and believed that God was with him and was listening to him, he wouldn't have been so quick to lie and push his wife out the door saying, just take off your wedding ring.

[53 : 29] Keep it quiet. Let's try and hide this arrangement so my skin is safe. If Isaac had remembered that God was with him, listening to these conversations, seeing what was happening, surely he wouldn't have lived this way.

So clearly, Isaac, he makes a hash of things. He makes the same mistakes that his father made. God but the reality is, we all do.

And often with the apostle Paul in Romans 7 and verse 19, we say what Isaac could very easily have said, I imagine.

Paul says, for I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.

How often are we back in the place of prayer, back on our knees, back in confession, and telling the Lord about the same mistakes, the same sins, the same falls, the same failures.

[55 : 06] So we don't get to read Genesis 26 and point a long finger of condemnation at Isaac as we shake our heads. What we actually have to do is we have to look at this chapter like we look in the mirror and confess that we see much of Abraham and we see much of Isaac in our own life.

So we confess our sin and we worship the God of Abraham and Isaac. We worship him for his patience with us.

Is God not patient with you? He is with me. We worship him for his grace. The grace that he shows towards us.

We worship him for his love. The amazing love love that would take us back time and time again when we make the same kind of mistakes that we see in Isaac.

stream yesterday and I was doing the open grass bit.

[56 : 45] We'll finish with this pretty much. I was strumming the open grass bit and that bit is nice and clean and the grass is fairly thick and clear of debris. But there's other sections where the grass has got stones and all kinds of stuff on it.

So I had the trimmer and I had the gear on and I had the goggles. And where do you put goggles when you're strimming? Well, of course, most of the time you have the goggles hanging around the bottom of your neck.

So that's where they were. And I was strimming away and I came to a bit where it was a bit more stones and chips. And the next thing, a crack in the eye.

A wee stone comes up or a stick comes up and it caught me right in the eye and I had to stop and clear out the eye. And once everything was clear, that was fine.

And I got going again. And five minutes later, what happened? Same thing. Goggles are still down there, another bit in the eye.

[57 : 48] And as I was thinking about that, I was thinking about how we see this in Isaac, we see this in Abraham. We see this, spiritually speaking, in ourselves.

And God's word is so real and God's word is so true and God's word is so encouraging. Because the God that we worship is a God of grace and patience and bounding in love.

The God who sent his son, Emmanuel, God with us. to pay the price for our sin, to stand in our place and take the punishment for all our mistakes and to give to us that cloak of righteousness, his perfect righteousness that we receive as we believe in him, as we put our faith in Christ.

two more points. We'll carry them over to Wednesday night, I think. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your grace.

We thank you for your patience. We thank you, Father, for sending your son into this world. We thank you for the promise that was given to Abraham and Isaac was a promise that was fulfilled, that was answered in and through Jesus Christ, your son, our saviour.

[59 : 28] We thank you that he came to this world to be with us. We thank you that he lived for us a perfect, righteous life. We thank you that he died for us. He took all our sins, all our sorrows, all our mistakes, all our failures upon himself into his body on the tree.

And we thank you that as we believe in him, we are given the assurance that we are safe, that we are secure, that we are blessed through all that he has done.

So we ask that you would help us as we go into a new week, to be steadied and to trust you and to lean upon you when we experience problems, the problems that come to your people when we seek to live by faith.

We pray that we would be day by day in your word, once more being reminded and encouraged and boasted by your promises, the promises that are ours.

And we pray, Lord, that we would know your presence with us, your blessing, your hand upon us for good and everything.

[60 : 50] So hear our prayers, cleanse us from our sin, and keep us close to Jesus. For we pray these things in his name and for his sake. Amen.

We'll sing to finish Mission Praise 288. I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord. Lord. I need thee every hour, oh, gracious Lord, no tender voice like I can peace afford.

I need thee, oh, I need thee, every hour I need thee, oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.

I need thee every hour, say, hour, be my hour, and patience lose their power when thou art nigh.

I need thee, oh, I need thee, every hour I need thee, oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.

[62 : 36] I need thee every hour, enjoy your pain, I need thee, and the might for life is pain.

I need thee, oh, I need thee, every hour I need me, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.

I need thee every hour, teach thee thy will, and thy resources in me fulfill.

will. I need thee, oh, I need thee, every hour I need thee, oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.

I need thee every hour, oh, glory one.

[63 : 59] Oh, make me thine near, thou blessed Son. I need thee, oh, I need thee, every hour I need thee, oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.

And I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more. Amen.