

Text: Genesis 26:1-33

Title: "How God Blesses His Children"

Time: January 11, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The chapter we have read this morning about some events in the life of Isaac bear a resemblance to things we read about Abraham in chapter 20 and chapter 12. Because of this Moses begins the chapter by explaining that the famine we read about here is different from the famine he wrote about in regard to the life of Abraham in chapter 12 (v. 1a).

Yet in spite of the plain teaching of the text, there exist today many modern self-described Old Testament scholars who insist that this is not the case, that the narratives of chapters 12, 20, and 26 all stem from the same original source, which was modified for different purposes at different times by different authors. They deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Genesis – Deuteronomy).

What is the problem with crossing out verse one and teaching people that we actually have a second account of the same famine? The problem is that the inspired words of God written down by His prophet should not be crossed out. Jesus Christ taught that the words of Genesis were the words of Moses who was inspired by God, and Jesus Christ was not a fool. Jesus speaks of Genesis through Deuteronomy as both the words of Moses (Matt. 19:8) and the words of God (vv. 4-5).

The apostle Paul teaches that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and the word *all* in that verse gives us our precious doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. God inspired the text verbally, the very word selection, and God inspired the text of Scripture in a plenary sense, all the words without exception.

It is not for us this morning to label Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul “baffoons” in favor of adopting the insights of modern so-called scholarship when it comes to Genesis 26.

The problem of course with the modern approach to this passage is unbelief, not scholarship. Isaac was not such a man. He was a man of great faith, a child of faithful Abraham, and a child of God. Genesis 26 especially emphasizes that Isaac was a blessed child of God (vv. 3, 4, 12, 24, 29).

Genesis 27 will pick up again the story of Esau and Jacob in which Esau loses not only his birthright, but now also his blessing. Genesis 26 comes first to help us understand how great a loss this was. I want us to learn three things about “How God Blesses His Children” from the example of Isaac in this passage this morning.

I. God blesses His children by withholding blessing (vv. 1-6).

Illustration: I am reading a small book right now called *Stars and Their Purpose: Signposts in Space*. I picked it up when our family had the chance to visit the Creation Science Museum in Kentucky. Its author, Dr. Werner Gitt, is a very intelligent believer and young-earth creationist who worked for many years as Director and Professor at the German Federal Institute of Physics.

He has a chapter in that book called “Can the Stars Be Counted?” He points out that according to passages like Jer. 33:22, the Bible answer has always been “no, man cannot count the stars,” but that up until only recently the answer of science was always “yes, there are about 3000 of them” (p. 19).

God, of course, has the stars all counted and named; there is a finite number, but Jeremiah says man cannot count them. Dr. Gitt writes the following about counting the stars: “it is noteworthy that only now in the twentieth century we can fully

appreciate the astronomical import of biblical affirmations. It behooves us to trust biblical pronouncements in other cases as well. Let us now try to visualize the above-mentioned number of stars. No human being lives long enough to count such a large number, so we use a computer, one of the fastest ones available. It can do ten thousand million calculations in one second, which is extremely fast! But even at this great speed it would require 30 million years of non-stop counting stars, and indeed, no computer could last as long as that. God has foretold the result of such an endeavor through His prophet Jeremiah: ‘...as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore’ (Jer. 33:22).”

Application: This is the terminology required to put the blessing of God on the life of Isaac into proper perspective (v. 3). God is a good benefactor; He is very good at blessing; and yet as we begin this wonderful chapter regarding the way God blesses, we find parched ground, dying crops and livestock, no water, and hungry mouths to feed. God sometimes blesses His children by withholding material blessings.

Have you ever been to one of those “Give me your money, do what I say, and you will get rich” conferences? That is not the doctrine we read about in Genesis 26. The riches with which God wants to bless us are ultimately far more than the wealth Isaac accumulates in this passage. Note two evidences of this in the section we just read:

1. God withholds blessing to teach us to obey His word (vv. 2, 5-6).

The Lord gives Isaac a number of direct commands here about how to respond to the famine he was experiencing (v. 2). Isaac obeyed (v. 6). He had evidently learned from the example of his father in this regard (v. 5). Note that the “charge” or “custodianship” is the commandments, statutes, and laws. Neither Abraham nor Isaac had these in written form. But

here we sit this morning with the entire written revelation of God in our laps. If it is Isaac's custodianship to obey, how much greater must our responsibility be?

2. God withholds blessing to teach us to trust His promises (vv. 3-4).

When we speak of a *sojourn* I tend to think of a trip or a vacation. The Hebrew word here is the word for being a *stranger* or a *foreigner*. The command is really, "embrace your status as a foreigner or a pilgrim here in this foreign land."

And what does God say Isaac will get for his trouble, those servants and flocks and herds we read about later? No. He shall get things that cannot be taken from him, the presence and blessing of God, and a descendant who shall own all lands, be multiplied as the stars of heaven with faithful followers, and by whom the nations of the world will bless themselves as He rules and reigns over them. In other words, Isaac was to leave the world that he might have Jesus. God blesses us with withheld blessing to draw us closer to Christ and to focus our lives on laying up treasures in heaven.

So what are we living for? Is it all that we can accumulate now, or all that we can lay up for then? Have we learned to care well with obedience for the custodianship of the word of God that you and I enjoy? God blesses us with withheld blessings to teach us these things.

II. God blesses His children by showing them their weaknesses (vv. 7-11).

Illustration: It is an awful thing to not know your weaknesses. Recently I have met some with a cheerful greeting whom I have not seen for a while, and I have gotten a look back that says, "he does not really know how bad his beard looks, does he?" Well, that's right, I don't.

Legends are told of people who did not know their weaknesses. The emperor thought he had a pair of new clothes, but he did not. Aesop made the same point in the tale of a fox and a crow:

“A coal-black crow once stole a piece of meat. She flew to a tree and held the meat in her beak. A fox, who saw her wanted the meat for himself, so he looked up into the tree and said, ‘How beautiful you are, my friend! Your feathers are fairer than the dove’s. Is your voice as sweet as your form is beautiful? If so, you must be the queen of birds.’ The crow was so happy in hearing the fox’s praise that she opened her mouth to show how she could sing. Down fell the piece of meat. The fox seized upon it and ran away.” The crow’s weakness was her susceptibility to praise. The fox knew it, but she did not.

The Lord wants us to be delivered from the fox and keep our piece of meat. He wants us to have a humble appreciation for our weaknesses, and so he blesses us by showing them to us in sometimes painful ways. I want us to see four things about Isaac’s weakness that may be true of our own.

1. Isaac’s weakness was the selfishness of fear (v. 7).

Those two failings go together. Isaac is fearful, but his is a selfish fear. Fear is always selfish whenever it is not the fear of the Lord. We can excuse ourselves for fearfulness, but excusing ourselves for selfishness is not as easy, is it? But fear can be selfish just as courage can be selfless.

Is selfish fear one of your weaknesses? Do you find yourself watching out fearfully for your own concerns, or are you found courageously caring for the concerns of others? Did you notice that verse 8 indicates that Isaac’s fears were unfounded? Satan is described as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but the metaphor stops short of describing a flesh-tearing lion seeking whom he may devour. Satan is limited in

what he can do. He must devour us with his roar, and this is why the Lord so often tells us as His children to not be afraid (see v. 24). He told all the great men of God, "Fear not!" He told Abraham and Moses and Joshua and Gideon and Daniel, "Fear not." Whom among us need not hear that this morning?

2. Isaac's weakness was the same as his father's (Gen. 20:1-2).

The Bible teaches that it is the responsibility of those of us to whom God has entrusted children to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. A part of that is understanding that we need to do all we can to avoid reproducing our own failures in their lives.

Illustration: Even the world used to recognize the importance of this principle. I can remember growing up seeing commercials that were sponsored by the American Cancer Society, I believe, that showed a young boy grabbing a pack of cigarettes after his dad had just lit up. They made a good point.

We need to make sure our homes are spiritual greenhouses so that they can bear healthy spiritual fruit in the lives of our children. The Lord Jesus takes very seriously causing little ones to stumble.

3. Isaac's weakness was accompanied by an important strength – love for his wife (v. 8).

The word translated *sporting* is that intensive form of the word for *laughter* that the name *Isaac* is related to. Some translators give the word a sexual meaning here, but the word is more general than that where it is used elsewhere. What we know about the details of what Abimelech saw was that it was done in the courtyard, although they likely thought they were alone, and that it was not something that you find brothers and sisters doing. The way they enjoyed one another's company gave evidence that they were a married couple.

I think it is right to see here something fairly innocent because it did happen in the courtyard, but there are just some things brothers and sisters do not do when they are together in the courtyard.

So how ought this affect our behavior as the family of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ? Certainly, we need to make sure that we treat one another as brother and sister and not as married couples unless we are married couples (2 Tim. 5:1-2). *Purity* is the watchword Paul uses for the relationship between brothers and sisters in Christ, and Genesis 26 makes clear that there are certain things that brothers and sisters do not do. We ought to have high standards when it comes to treating one another as the family of God, and we ought to restrict the pleasures Abimelech saw to the bonds of marriage.

4. Isaac's weakness was a failure, but not fatal (vv. 9-11).

The reason God blesses us by showing us our weakness is so that we can have victory over it through frank, humble, confession. Compare Isaac's assessment of his actions in verse 9 with his thinking in verse 7. In verse 7 the fault belonged to "the men of the place." In verse 9 the fault lay squarely with himself. This is the key to confession: "I'm through blaming someone else. I did what was wrong, and I'm sorry. Period." This brings ultimate victory over the failures of our weakness.

III. God blesses His children by meeting their needs and granting them good gifts (vv. 12-33).

Application: Isaac's example teaches us three things we ought to do when God blesses us.

First, we ought to recount the goodness of God's provisions for us (vv. 12-14a). We have nothing, except from the good hand of God, and we have a tremendous amount. We should be thankful and not boastful.

Second, we ought to live peaceably in a hostile world because of God's provisions for us (vv. 14b-22). Isaac's possessions did not go to his head; he did not leave the Lord and scheme about how he could take over Abimelech's kingdom. His desire was to use his resources to be a blessing to the Lord and to others around him. It was the Philistines who played the politics of envy and class warfare. This is not what God's people believe. We believe in freedom, and we rejoice in the good achievements of hard-working people.

Finally, we ought to demonstrate a concern that others know the Lord who has been so good to us (vv. 26-33). We could say a lot about the testimony of Isaac here. His testimony to the world began with his worship of the Lord (v. 25). He generously fed others (v. 30). He lived peaceably with men, and they knew that the Lord was with him.

Conclusion: Who knows about us this morning that we are the blessed of the Lord? This is why God has blessed us in the many diverse ways He does, so that His glory might shine forth from our lives. May we be good examples of how God blesses His children like Isaac was.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*