



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 26: 1-35

Isaac: The Passive And Patient Patriarch

TRANSCRIPT

Will you turn in your Bibles to chapter 26 of the Book of Genesis for the Scripture reading this morning and we will read the entire chapter, Genesis chapter 26. Beginning with the first verse. For those of you who may not have been here in the previous hours we are in that section of Genesis in which the life of Jacob has become the predominant theme and in the preceding sections, we read of the birth of Jacob and Esau and then Esau's sale of the birthright to Jacob. So, now we pick up the story in Genesis Chapter 26 in a chapter that is, somewhat surprisingly in some ways devoted, entirely to Isaac.

“Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech, king of the Philistines. The Lord appeared to him and said: Do not go down to Egypt. Stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you, and your descendants, I will give all these lands and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and will give your descendants all these lands, and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws. (By the way, those words charge, commandments, statutes, and laws are not simply general terms, but are references to specific events

in Abraham's life, such as the right of circumcision and Abraham's obedience to that. We do not have time to talk about that, but they may be related to specific things in Abraham's life.) So Isaac lived in Gerar. When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, ‘She is my sister,’ for he was afraid to say, ‘my wife,’ thinking, ‘The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.’ (And may I also add this that it was customary in the Near East to speak of a relative such as Rebekah was to Isaac as sister, so he might well have rationalized just as Abraham did about his half sister Sarah and he might have spoken and accurately, "she is my sister," but of course he really was lying since he was trying to deceive Abimelech just as Abraham had deceived men about Sarah. Verse 8: And it came about when he had been there a long time that Abimelech, King of the Philistines, looked out through a window and saw and behold Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. Then Abimelech called Isaac and said: ‘Behold, certainly, she is your wife! How then did you say she is my sister?’ Isaac said to him, ‘Because I said lest I die on account of her.’ And 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.’”

No doubt, if you have been following us through in the Book of Genesis, you will have been puzzled perhaps, amazed perhaps, that we should have three incidents in the Book of Genesis which are so similar. Twice Abraham lied about Sarah, his wife, and now Abraham's son Isaac lies about Rebekah. It would be natural for unbelieving critics to devise a theory that what we really have is just one incident that has been given in three different places in the Book of Genesis, multiplied into three accounts, and consequently, we do not expect the account of the Book of Genesis to be totally accurate. But if you read these accounts carefully, you will notice that while there is a similarity between them, obvious similarity, there are also obvious differences between them. And furthermore, you will notice, as you read this account, that there is an indication that the previous accounts are known because when Abimelech says, ‘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,’ he evidences

by that that he was acquainted with the previous account in the 20th chapter where Abimelech, that Abimelech, who is a different Abimelech from this one, since Abimelech was a kind of dynastic name like a czar or a pharaoh, that Abimelech is told that if such a thing had happened, guilt and judgment would have come upon them, so this one knows about that. In other words, this account is an account that presupposes the previous account. We do have three different accounts and it is not surprising considering the nature of man.

“So Abimelech charged all the people saying, ‘He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.’ Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundred fold and the Lord blessed him. (That is the fulfillment of the promise in verse 3 where He said He would bless him.) And the man became rich and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy, for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household so that the Philistines envied him. Now all the wells, which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham, his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, ‘Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us.’ And Isaac departed from there and camped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. Then Isaac dug again, the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the same names which his father had given them. When Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water (like an artesian well) the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac saying, ‘The water is ours.’ So he named the well Esek because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah, (enmity) and he moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it so he named it ‘Rehoboth,’ for he said, ‘At last, the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.’ (Broad places, Rehoboth.) Then he went up from there to Beersheba, and the Lord appeared to him the same night. (That is rather striking. He is back in Beersheba, and at that point, it would appear from this incident that he must have been thought to have been out of the will of

God in Gerar. He comes back to Beersheba, and there the Lord appears to him the same night and said: “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.”) 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. (This is the well chapter of the Bible, no doubt about it.) Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar, with his adviser Ahuzzath, and Phicol, the commander of his army. And Isaac said to them, ‘Why have you come to me, since you hate me and had sent me away from you?’ (That sounds almost like a lady’s words to her husband, does it not? “You hate me.”) And they said, ‘We see plainly that the Lord has been with you; so we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, even 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, (that of course was Abimelech's lie) and I have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.’ Then he made them a feast and they ate and drank and in the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace. Now it came about on the same day, that Isaac's servants came in and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, ‘We have found water.’ So he called it Shibah. (That is a term that could mean one of two things: it is very close to the word for "seven" in Hebrew and also for the word "oath." Beersheba.) Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, (and that is very interesting and striking and bares a relationship to the next chapter at which Jacob obtains Esau's blessing) and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah (and this tempers the feeling of compassion that people often have for Esau. This gives us an insight into the character of Esau. It was an act of defiance when he married the Hittite women.)

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let us bow together in a moment of prayer.

The subject for this morning in the continuation of our exposition of the Book of Genesis is "Isaac, the Passive and Patient Patriarch." The 26th chapter of the Book of Genesis is really not an

easy chapter because it is a chapter in which there are things that are said about Isaac and then there are things that are said that do not especially make for interesting preaching according to what preachers usually think are interesting things. I don't think that many people want to preach on the wells of Isaac that he dug, for example and I must confess that in spite of all of the study that I have done of chapter 26 of the Book of Genesis that stands out still as the chapter that has to do with the wells.

Among the patriarchs, Isaac attained to the greatest age, the ripe age of 180, so he lived for five years longer than Abraham himself, but this middleman of the patriarchal triumvirate has only this chapter devoted him in the Old Testament. Now, of course, he looms large in Genesis chapter 22 when Abraham offered him up on Mount Moriah, but this is really the only chapter in which we have a great deal devoted to the life of this second man of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I must confess that when I thought about preaching on this, I could not help but think of that comedian who frequently says, "I don't get no respect."

It's almost as if Isaac is the one of the patriarchs who does not get proper respect. Griffith Thomas said concerning him, "his was a quiet, peaceful, normal life. He was the ordinary son of a great father, and the ordinary father of a great son." And those words are really typical of Isaac. He is not as significant as Abraham, and he is not as significant as his son, Jacob, at least according to the writer of the Book of Genesis. And another of the remarkable things about this chapter is the resemblance that Isaac's experiences bear to Abraham's.

For example, he has to contend with the famine in the land just as his father did, he has to take a trip down into the land of the Philistines just as his father did, he has to deal with the king of the Philistines whose name was Abimelech, that was a dynastic title and so he had to contend with Abimelech just as Abraham had to contend with Abimelech. And then of course he has the same experience of lying about his wife. Abraham lied about Sarah twice, and even though Isaac must have known about this for the traditions were handed down, still he lies about Rebekah.

There are other striking lessons in Genesis chapter 26 as is true of most of the chapters of the Bible. One is, how believers meet difficulties in their daily lives, and Isaac gives us some good instruction concerning that. We also have an illustration of the sovereignty of the grace of God; even after he lies, God blesses him richly. One might have expected some disciplinary experiences on the part of Isaac, but he does not seem to have any. God pours out tremendous physical and material blessings upon this man, even though he has lied so abysmally about his wife, Rebekah. It is an illustration of the sovereignty of the grace of God in his dealings with men. And I think also one of the great lessons of the chapter is the wisdom of meekness, manifested in the life of Isaac. He was a meek man. In this, he was like our Lord.

Now the Scriptures, when they speak of meekness, do not speak of weakness. We are inclined to think that if a person is a meek man, that means he is a weak man, but meekness is not weakness. Many have commented upon the fact that around the racetrack, the horse that wins races is often called a meek horse, because he was subject to the riders' directions more fully than others and consequently the jockeys speak of a horse that is good horse as a meek horse. Pliable. He responds to the directions of the jockey. Well, meekness in on the Bible is looked at as a strength rather than a weakness and Isaac was a meek man and this is a beautiful illustration of how a Christian should be. That is not weakness; it is strength to be meek.

The Apostle Paul, when he speaks in the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and says, "If possible so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Might well have had Isaac in mind for that was the kind of man that he was. It illustrates also I think the truth of Proverbs chapter 16 and verse 7: "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." And Isaac gained in that respect by his meekness rather than his weakness.

In the last two verses of the chapter, in connection with Esau and the marriage with the Hittite women, we have an illustration of the sin of compromise. We are inclined to be sorry for Esau and I think in the next chapter when we study the stolen blessing, we will feel sorry again naturally for Esau. Our sympathies would rest with him rather than with Jacob who schemed with

his mother to steal the blessing but we should never forget that Esau is the person who defiantly rebelled against the teaching of the word of God and brought grief upon his father and mother, Isaac and Rebekah.

I remember a story that a Bible teacher used to tell, and I understand that it has been told by others as well, about a hunter who was just ready to kill a bear. He raised his rifle. The bear called out, "Can't we talk this over like two sober human beings?" and the hunter lowered his gun. He said, "What's to talk over?" "Well, for instance," said the bear, coming a little bit closer, "Why do you want to shoot me for?" And the hunter said: "It's simple. I want a fur coat." "Well, all I want is a good breakfast," said the bear. "I am sure we can get together and talk sensibly over this." So they sat down to work out an agreement. After awhile, the bear got up all alone. They reached a compromise. The bear secured his breakfast, and the hunter had on his fur coat. [Laughter]

Well, in the warfare between the flesh and the spirit there never has been any other result than that ultimately the flesh wins when compromise takes place. And so when Esau compromised, it was obvious that the flesh would win. It is a great illustration of the sin of compromise. It is very, very destructive of spiritual things.

While we turn now to Genesis chapter 26 and we look at the first 11 verses for a few moments in which Moses speaks of the famine and the deception. God will, in a sense, put Isaac to test by virtue of his providential dealings. Now, there was a famine in the land. I sympathize with Isaac because after all God had given Abraham great promises. He had said that He would give him this land. He had assured him that this land would be something to possess, that he would be proud of, but what do you do when the land which has been promised to you is a land in which there is no bread? There was a famine in the land, so I must say I sympathize with him because surely he must have thought long and hard over the promises of God.

What about the promises when there is no bread in the land? There are 13 famines referred to in the Bible, so I am told, and either this is God's trial of Isaac, or else it is Satan's attempt to destroy the seed of the woman by forcing Isaac to yield and to get out of the land and thus get into

difficulty. Well, we read that Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech, King of the Philistines and the Lord appeared to him at that point. It is not easy to stay in the land. The blessings of the covenant were distant and so he begins to move, and it is possible he was on his way to Egypt and just stopped here but God arrested his plans, appeared to him, and said: "Do not go down into Egypt, Isaac. Stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you for to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father, Abraham."

So God promises to bless this mediocre son of a great father and he says, "I will establish the oath." Now remember that after Isaac had been offered up by Abraham, God had confirmed the promises by an oath to Abraham, so He not only has faithfully promised that He would bless Abraham and his seed in a certain way, but He has added to His Word, His oath. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes a great deal over this. He says, "By two immutable things, God's word and God's oath." Now, if there is anybody who does not need to swear, it's God. Englishmen like to say an Englishman's word is his bond. That is a lie, of course, because Englishmen tell lies just like anyone else but they like to think that they are true to their word, but there is of course only one person who is true to His word. The very fact that we require people who stand in a witness box to give an oath is evidence of the knowledge of the depravity of men but God stoops to the level of men's weakness and not only gives the promise, but in addition gives an oath. It is almost as if He says: "To the saints of God, I love you. It is true, I swear it. I swear it by my Name." And then, in faithfulness, in time the Redeemer comes and sheds His blood on the cross in order that the promises might be fulfilled. So, He says, "I will establish the oath which I swore to your father, Abraham."

We really do not need any oaths. All we need is the word of God. If God has said it in the Scriptures, it is true. It is really a sign of weakness to say, "Lord, will you swear to it? We'll put you on the witness box and have you put your hand on the Bible, and say that you are going to keep your word. Now notice the 5th verse. He says: "I am going to bless you. By your seed, all the nations of

the Earth shall be blessed because Abraham obeyed me and kept my charge." That might seem as, if you read it without the knowledge of the story of Abraham, that might seem as if He were saying, "Abraham's obedience is the ultimate cause of the blessing which you are going to have, Isaac," but that is not true.

After all, why did Abraham obey when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees when he was worshipping other gods? God called him; brought him into the land. God brought him to the knowledge of justification. In fact, from the beginning of Abraham's life on through to the end, it was God who in prevenient grace blessed him. So, Abraham's obedience may be spoken of as the ground of blessing, but the Scriptures make it plain that Abraham's obedience is an effect of the working of God, the previous working of God. So, it's because Abraham obeyed, but fundamentally it is because Abraham obeyed out of response to the fundamental preworking of the Holy Spirit of God. You never can read the Bible properly if you do not put it together, all together, and read it in that way.

Now following this, we read in the 6th or 7th verse: Isaac lived in Gerar and when the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister." So in response to the exhortation from the Lord, Isaac dwelt in Gerar but, what is it we say? "Like father, like son." When men asked about Rebekah, he said, "She is my sister." He later says, why? He said, "I was afraid that the men might kill me on account of Rebekah for she is beautiful." Now, Rebekah was about 60 years of age. Some people, many people perhaps, have difficulty thinking that anyone 60 could be beautiful, but women 60 years of age may be beautiful. Sarah was about 90 and she was beautiful. So Rebekah was a beautiful woman, and Isaac lies, says, "She is my sister."

Now the thing that is interesting about this, one of the things that is interesting about it, is that Isaac is a man of faith. He is a great man of faith, one of the patriarchs. He is singled out by God for special mention all through the Bible, but here he mixes with his faith, fear, selfishness, and other flaws. He lied. Think of that, a patriarch lying. You can see how somebody in Believers Chapel might lie. But a patriarch? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Abraham lied, Isaac lied, Jacob lied. You

see, the story the Bible gives us of the saints of God is not precisely the story that we like to think of is the story of a saint of God.

Men, generally speaking, hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and they hear the gospel and they respond and in a moment they pass from death into life, from darkness into the marvelous light of the forgiveness of sins. They have come to the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins through the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are saved. They become Christians but then, for years, the history of most of us is, for years, the Holy Spirit works to conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus. Sanctification is a lengthy process, so we do not expect the children of God to be immediately great examples of men and women of faith. And at anytime, it is possible for the saints of God to fail, and here is one of the patriarchs failing.

This is one of the things that enables us to see how unintelligible spiritually is the criticism of the critics of the Book of Genesis, for they look at this and say: "Ah! In Genesis chapter 12, we read about Abraham lying. In Genesis chapter 20, we read about him lying again about Sarah, and now we read about Isaac lying about Rebekah. And furthermore, they lie in the same way. They say, "She's my sister." So, what is this? This is really one story. That was just one time when this happened. And what we have is just three divergent accounts built up by tradition. They circulated separately. Things were added and subtracted from them. It really only happened once. It's incredible that this should happen three times.

Really, it is incredible that it did not happen more. As a matter of fact, it happened more because Abraham said, remember, "We established a policy, Sarah and I, when we came out, that every time this happened, I would say it: She's my sister." It is only recorded once or twice in the Bible. He probably lied a number of times about that specific thing because Sarah was beautiful. Every little village he went through and stayed, they would look and say, "That man's married to a beautiful woman." He would say, "She's my sister," because it was not uncommon to kill the man to have the woman. So, it is not incredible that this should be three times in the Bible; it is incredible that it is only three times in the Bible. The critics, you see, not being believers, do not understand the

nature of man. Man's nature is just as it is presented in Scripture. That is what I love about Scripture: It really tells it like it is.

Child. How does a child learn that a stove is hot? Through the lectures of parents? Oh! You know you can deliver a lecture to a child: "Now, don't touch that! It's hot!" You can have an introduction, three points, and a conclusion and even use visual aids, but it will not work. The one thing that will really teach your child is, putting the finger on the stove. So like father, like son, Isaac had heard this story. He had heard the story of Abraham. He knew all about Abraham and Sarah and how he had lied about Sarah but, he did not profit from the example of his father, he had to try it out himself. And of course, it is simply an illustration of the depravity of man. Yes, the depravity of man, total depravity.

Now remember when we say total depravity, we do not mean that man is as bad as he can be. When people talk about the doctrine of total depravity, they do not mean that. Some people are put off by the term "total depravity" because they can think of some man who was perhaps a philanthropist and gave some money so that the city is benefited by some architectural masterpiece or some architectural blunder that is in the city. But when total depravity is referred to, it means simply that man's sin, the sin of Adam, has touched man's being, all parts of his being, not to the degree that it might, but his mind has been touched and so he is blinded. His will has been touched and so he is rebellious. His emotions have been touched, so he is corrupt. Total depravity means simply that all of the man has been affected by sin. And so the Bible is true to life because men are totally depraved. We are totally depraved.

I always think of the story that Dr. Barnhouse used to tell so often about, and I have told it before here, pardon me if you have heard it, about the young man who had been brought up in one of the worst slums of New York. He had come from one of the smaller countries of Eastern Europe, but he managed to attain fame and fortune in the theatrical field through his literary talents, which he developed. Finally, he bought a yacht and he hired a man to run the yacht, and he assumed

the title of captain, so he got himself a resplendent uniform with all of the gold braid and brass buttons and invited his old mother out to take a look at the yacht and also at him.

Now, she had retained the native common sense of a mother from Eastern Europe, and consequently she had great skill in deflating egos. And so he brought her on the boat and he went down below, he put on his beautiful uniform and he came up and walked on the deck of the ship and said, "Look, Mama! I'm a captain." And she took a careful look at him, and she said, "Sammy, by you, you is a captain, and by me, you is a captain, but by captains you is no captain." And it illustrates the fact that when we speak about whether a man is good or bad, we tend to speak by human standards. We say he is a good man and when we speak by the divine standards, there are no good men. There is none good. "No, not one," the Apostle Paul says. Now, when he said that, he did not mean that men do not do good things. He meant simply that in the sight of God, men fall short of the standard of God and the sin of Adam has touched all facets of our being. And if God the Holy Spirit has brought understanding to you, you will agree with me, you will admit that your mind is blinded with respect to spiritual things, and you will admit that your heart is rebellious, not totally, but just touched by sin, rebellious. And furthermore, that your emotions are corrupt.

So, I am not surprised that Isaac lied. This does not surprise me at all. It merely lets us know that he is one of the human race. Now, Abimelech found it out. And he found it out in a most interesting way. Evidently, he and Isaac lived not far apart because Abimelech could look out of his window and look down upon Isaac and Rebekah. And so we read in the 8th verse it came about when he had been there for a long time. He got away with it for a long time. Everybody all over the little town of Gerar was saying, "That's his sister, that's his sister," but as is often the case, his emotions got out of control. And so Abimelech looked down through a window. You could see him peeking down through the lattice. And there he saw Isaac caressing his wife, Rebekah. Now, too old to know what he was doing, of course. The Authorized Version says he was "sporting with" his wife. Now, Isaac's name means "laughter" by the way, and the word translated here "sporting" or translated "caressing" is from the same root. So, it is almost as if Isaac, whose name means

"laughter" was taking playful merry liberties with Rebekah. And he was doing some things that when Abimelech looked down, he said, "Ah! She is not his sister!"

Matthew Henry says, “Nowhere may a man more allow himself to be innocently married than with his own wife and children.” That is true, and I hope if you are happily married, you and your husband have some playful times, too. It is perfectly all right, that is the way it ought to be. I will tell you something, because the family is not here right now. We have a lovely couple in the church. I never would tell you of course, who they are, but a lovely couple, very proper in every way, just the way people ought to be. And they also have some children. I would not tell you when this happened, it is a long time ago, but the little boy came up to me one time. They tell preachers funny things, they really do. And he came up to me and he said, "Dr. Johnson, people think that my father is very quiet and reserved." He did not use these terms, but this is what he was saying. "People think my father is very quiet and reserved, but at home he is different with Mama." [Laughter] I suspected it anyway, but he told me.

So, Isaac was caressing Rebekah, his wife, and sporting with her and Abimelech saw the truth and called Isaac to him and he said: "Isaac, what is it that you have done to us? One of the people might have easily have lain with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us." So here is the heathen rebuking the believer, again. When a Christian disobeys, you can almost always be sure that the worldling will be peeking out of the window, and he will see and observe and sometimes he will bring reproach on the name of the God that the Christian worships because of the Christian's sin. God, it easily could be, could prevent this but he does not do it. He permits His name to be reproached by the disobedience of believers. And in this case, Isaac had lied and now he is found out. And the embarrassing thing about it is, is that he is found out by the unbelieving Abimelech.

Well, the section that follows details the fluctuating fortunes of Isaac. If you get one of the “Believers Bible Bulletin,” you can read some of the material there. I am just going to mention a couple of things since our time is almost gone. Is it not striking that right after this lying on Isaac's

part, we have no indication that he confessed his sin, but still God blesses Isaac? We read in verse 12 that Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundred fold and the Lord blessed him. He became a very wealthy man. He had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household. He had all of the money and possessions that Abraham had for Abraham gave everything to Isaac, but now he has multiplied the material wealth of Abraham so that he is a very wealthy man. It is an illustration of the sovereignty of the grace of God in blessing men. And He blesses him. No doubt, I mean, no doubt, he had private ways in which he dealt with Isaac but publicly Isaac was a man blessed of the Lord because this was a testimony to the greatness of his God, Yahweh.

The envy that the Philistines felt soon turned to spite and as a result, they began to fill up the wells that Isaac was digging which Abraham had built. He needed these wells. He had great flocks, great herds. He needed water. But they would go around filling them up and so trouble came and it was necessary for him to leave the land. Evidently, they did not want him to have wells in the land because that might be a tacit admission that he had a right to be there and own property.

Well, we read in the latter part of that section in verses 15 through 22 about how that happened and now the last part of the chapter has to do with the covenant that was made at Beersheba. Finally, we read in verse 23 that Isaac went up from there to Beersheba and the very moment that he arrived in Beersheba, the Lord appeared to him. But I think that does perhaps indicate that it was never God's will for Isaac to leave the land for Gerar. He said, "I am the God of your father, Abraham." There is no merit in it for Isaac. He blesses Isaac for the sake of Abraham and in turn blessed Abraham for the sake of His own name.

And as a result of the reiteration of the promises to Isaac, we read in verse 25: “So Isaac 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.” Here is the place where Isaac is in perfect harmony with Abraham and with Jacob. He builds the altar because he is fundamentally convinced that the way that men approach God is by virtue of sacrifice. So he builds the altar, he puts the animal upon the sacrifice, he slays the animal, the blood is shed, and in this way he worships the Lord. This is nothing more than what we

have been saying all along; it is an anticipation of the ultimate sacrifice of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It is all typical of Him. And thus, in the building of the altar, we can see the affirmation of the theology of the patriarchs, and it is a theology of the penal substitutionary sacrifice as a means of approach to God. The animal must die under the judgment of the priest or the person who slays the animal, in token of the fact that the animal should die, the animal standing for the individual.

He acknowledges that he stands under judgment. So when the Lord Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" He was dying under the judgment of God for our sin. The animal is slain rather than Isaac and the Lord Jesus Christ is slain rather than the saints of God. It is penal, substitutionary sacrifice, and as a result of the fire and the smoke that ascends up on high, God smells a sweet savor. And he smelled a sweet savor when the Lord Jesus died on Calvary's cross. He cried out, "It is finished!" He was satisfied. The Father was satisfied, propitiated because his holiness, his righteousness had received that which satisfied Him. This is the gospel we proclaim, that you should die under the judgment of God, but a substitute has died for sinners and has satisfied the claims of a righteous and holy God and you who stand in him have acceptance with him. He built an altar.

Not only that, He called on the name of the Lord. He extolled the virtues and merits of the person, of this individual called Yahweh whom he worshipped. These altars are significant signposts and they are followed by worship, calling upon the name of the Lord. He pitched his tent there, right around the altar that he had constructed in token of his communion with the Lord on the basis of the sacrifice. Then he dug wells. I guess that is significant of the service that one renders. Those verbs of verse 25 express those aspects of what it means to know the true God.

Is it not interesting and somewhat striking that in the flag of the United States of America we should have red, white, and blue? We speak of the red, white, and blue. We do not speak of the white, blue, and red or the white, red, and blue or the blue, red, and white. It is always the red, white, and blue because there was a theological reason for that. The red, suggesting the sacrifice, the white, suggesting the purity that flows out of the sacrifice, and the blue, suggestive of Heaven. Even in the

flag of this country, there was bound up some theology: Red, white, and blue, suggestive of the truth of holy Scripture.

Well, the conclusion of the covenant is an apt illustration of Romans chapter 12 and verse 18. Isaac has only a very, very mild rebuke for Abimelech. He could have said a great deal, but he said, "Why have you come to me since you hate me?" And then Abimelech says, "We've done nothing but good to you; we've treated you well." He was lying himself. Isaac said nothing about it. He said, "We'll conclude the covenant." The next morning they concluded the covenant and I see it was an apt illustration of being at peace with all men. It is also a beautiful illustration of when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. It is Abimelech who comes and asks for the covenant.

Well, the chapter concludes with that final note of the open defiance of Esau. He defied the defiant principles. He neither desired the blessing of God nor did he dread the curse of God. It illustrates again the sovereignty of the grace of God. There was a family in Lyons in France that had two children, two men, two boys. One of them was named John. From his earliest days, he was studious, thoughtful, reverent. And later at the age of 27, he wrote the first edition of a book that became one of the world's greatest books and certainly one of the greatest in the Western world, affecting our Western civilization probably more than any other one volume. It was entitled 'The Institutes of the Christian Religion'. When he died in Geneva in 1564, he bequeathed to the Western world some of the great principles by which we live today. He had another brother. His name was Charles. Charles was different from John. He pursued a course of profligacy and dissipation, lived a life as worthless and infamous as his brother's life was noble and glorious. How do you explain the difference between the two men? A Presbyterian minister said, "You explain the difference in choice." But how do you explain the choice? How do you explain the choice by which John Calvin became the man that he did, and Charles Calvin became the man that he became? You explain the choice of the sovereign mercy of God. That is the way John explained it. That is the way Paul explains it. That is the way Malachi explains it. That is the way Moses explained it. "Jacob have I

loved, Esau have I hated." It is the sovereignty of the grace of God. But it is justified and men are responsible and Esau is responsible and evidences his own failure by the kind of life that he lived.

Well, I said Isaac was the ordinary son of a great father, and he is the ordinary father of a great son and incidentally, you can also say he was the ordinary husband of a very clever wife. And we shall read about her and study about her next week. But he was a splendid character, and I think you can see in his response to the trivial difficulties that he faced some things that are very important for us. I wonder how the other men of the patriarchal triumvirate would have handled the wells and I think when the Philistines began to fill up the wells that Abraham had dug, he would have protested. After all, he went out with 300 men and won a great military victory. I can just imagine that he would have protested very strongly if they had done that to him. And Jacob, how would he have acted? Well, he would have gone down and he would have talked it over with them and it would not be long before he not only had his wells back, but he would have some of theirs, too. He was that kind of patriarch. But Isaac, what did he do? He just went on digging more wells. He was truly a meek man, in the proper sense. One of the puritans said, "To lengthen my patience is the best way to shorten my troubles." And Isaac is an illustration of that.

In the final analysis, of course, he stands as a beautiful example of Philippians chapter 1 and verse 6 where Paul writes, "Being confident of this very thing, that He that hath begun a work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." It is one of the great promises of the word of God. Now those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ will be sanctified for God loves His saints and works toward their ultimate sanctification. We may make it difficult for Him, but the sovereignty of grace shall ultimately triumph.

If you are here this morning and you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, of course you do not have the Holy Spirit working in your life to your ultimate sanctification. We invite you to put your trust in him, whom to know is life eternal, who has offered the one sacrifice, Who has been slain as the sacrifice for sinners, and through whom you may have forgiveness of sins. You may become a child of God through faith in him. May God the Holy Spirit bring you to the knowledge

of your sin, guilt, and condemnation, and may by the grace of God, you flee to the Cross for the remedy. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these ancient stories which so relevantly portray the life that Thou hast given us to live many centuries later. Enable us, O God, to respond in faith to the experiences of life. We know that so often, like Isaac, we mix with faith, fear, selfishness, rebellion. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, deliver us from ourselves and from our sin. Fashion us like unto the Lord Jesus Christ and Lord, for those who may be here without Him, we pray O God that Thou art work mightily giving faith and the salvation that means eternal life. May grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.