

THERE'S A FAMINE IN THE LAND

Genesis 26th – Sermon - Glyn Watson

In today's reading, although it is one story, there are four significant teachings and applications we can make to ourselves today. I have done something I don't usually do, and that gives my points a title, but in a flash of inspired creativity I have so here there are;

1. There's a famine in the land (v1-6)
2. Like father like son (V7-11)
3. When opposition comes due to the blessing (12-22)
4. The funny things about perceptions (v23-33)

Now I am only going Focus on the first two this morning. I have put my notes the other two points on the website next to the KidZone resources tab for your perusal and reflection for this coming week.

I have a question, and it is a little odd.

Have you ever walked out into the rain on purpose, Just, JUST, to feel the rain not giving a RIP about getting wet or the cold?

When was the last time you playfully splashed in a puddle?

Rain is, for us here in the UK, is taken for granted where for many other countries it is rare and due to its lack is life-threatening.

If this week is anything to go by, we could look at the rain as an inconvenience oh we cant put our washing out on the line to dry

On the other side of the scale, too much rain can cause flooding, and we have seen a fair amount of flooding over the last two years.

1. There's a famine in the Land (V1-6)

There is another famine besides the one Isaacs Father Abraham experiences and endured, which forced him to travel to Egypt.

The text says and read that Isaac being the patriarch the man, the head of the house intends or is on his way to Egypt. But, God intervenes! "Do not go down to Egypt.";

God then commands him to stay and live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you."

Why not Egypt?

It is not because of what happened with Abraham in Egypt.
Why would God ask Isaac to stay in a place where there is a famine. Why would God tell Isaac not to go somewhere which due to their natural resources had everything they needed to survive?

They had the River Nile a trade route and an artery of water for its lands and vegetation. It could be said that their resources were plentiful.

What did Isaac have in Gerar? Nothing.

The difference between geographical locations is important.
Where those in Egypt depended on took for granted their geographical resource.
God calls Isaac to depend on God for his provision in Gerar. They relied on the rain and water wells.

It was a faith issue.

He had to trust in God to send the rain or direct him too well,
To satisfy him, his family's and Livestock's thirst & hunger.
God reaffirms His promise given to his father Abraham.

Essentially and unequivocally saying "trust in me, I got this, I got you, I will send the rain but in the meantime be patience.

Right from the time of Abraham, we see the beginning of a tradition a theme and a kind of people God is trying to shape and establish.

As a theme of Gods people being established in the wilderness is important because what was God trying to teach them

To depend on him and him alone.

You can take "MAN" out of the wilderness but do not let the wilderness escape the "MAN"—this dependence on God.

Isaac Stays in Gerar, and we learn that this is the territory of King Abimelek.

This is where things get a little tricky.
Would you agree that in the waiting or in a time where you feel squeezed, or God feels absent, the temptation to wander and go astray begins to grow, doing things in our own strength, forget God and fall into sin?

The text reads that it was almost immediately that when Isaac settled there, Rebekah started turning heads of the men in Gerar. This leads to my second point of the morning

2. Like Father Like Son (V7-11)

The men of that area questioned Isaac about his wife, Rebekah. We are told that she was a beauty, a stunner, she was hot stuff. And Isaac does something despicable. But we need to understand Isaac a little more because believe it or not he as a man doesn't have that much airtime in comparison to his father Abraham and his son Jacob.

Isaac was born in chapter 21, he is the son of the promise, he has a stepbrother, but if we're to be realistic and ask ourselves the question whether we would if we were Abraham choose to disclose his shameful act towards his mother Sarah, only nine chapters earlier in chapter 12. Would you share this sort of thing with your son or daughter?

The chances are Isaac didn't know, which makes things more interesting for us today as the reader.

He tells the men that Rebekah is his sister. In his selfish self-preservation, sins against his wife and puts her in a dangerous position to save himself. But, as a consequence putting the men in the area in a position of potential sin and Rebekah would be the physical, emotional and spiritual victim where he would be just the emotional victim.

There is a strong possibility that Isaac unknowingly, identically copied his father's action years before.

It is unavoidable and inevitable that we are going to be shaped by our parents, or whoever nurtures us. We pick up character traits, attitudes, mannerisms, coping mechanisms, beliefs, values and morals.

Isaac was defiantly his father's son, but perhaps this speaks more into an inherent nature than nurture.

If Abraham had told him, not explicitly, what he had done and chose to teach him respect for his wife, Isaac might not have done what he did.

However, we are all guilty, not of this particular area per-se. But, we all have on multiple occasions, put aside our personal moral values and duty to ourselves and others. We have all discarded our mother and father's instruction in selfishness. And ultimately failed and fallen short of God's standards and Glory in terms of our conduct to ourselves, others and Him.

Abimelech spots Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah and confronts and calls Isaac out on his sinful deception.

This is one of many occasions where God uses an outside agent (a Philistine) to teach a moral truth and standard to His people.

Sometimes even those outside of the faith have standards in which we fail to uphold as the supposed carriers of a higher calling of morality and truth.

This should humble us and throw our potential self-righteousness at the foot of the cross and marvel upon the grace and mercy God has shown us as a people.

However, Isaac makes it worse, look at it, he blames her.

He blames her beauty.

AS if her beauty has caused him to sin against her.

Her beauty is a threat in an unknown environment to his life!

His shoddy and unjust actions based on unreasonable justification and cowardice.

Abimelek calls him out on it, and it is multi-levelled.

LEVEL 1 – "What is this you have done to us?"

You lied and have potentially caused some of my men to sin in their mind.

Bringing dishonour to themselves by themselves.

The men might have been gossiping or catcalled or made inappropriate advances.

LEVEL 2 – "One of the men might well have slept with your wife."

His lie in effect could have caused one or two men to sin Physically with a Married woman.

If they had, Rebekah would have been violated and by proxy would have sinned by being complicit in the lie and run the risk of being raped.

She wouldn't have had an option.

Here options were impossible and genuinely unjust.

Either, RAT out your husband supposedly putting his life in danger

OR

Resign to your position and status in culture.

This was a deplorable position to put his wife.

There might be modern-day examples of this. However, there is something closely linked to women and men or children being abused in such ways.

LEVEL 3 - You would have brought guilt upon us.

The shame felt by the man or men upon finding out that they had slept with a married woman through deception.

Luckily in the text it says that no man had violated Rebekah –
But, in their mind, they could have looked upon her lustfully.

The consequences of our choices, our words and our actions are not limited to just ourselves. The consequences have knock-on effects on others, causing them to sin inadvertently.

Abimelek probably knew this because he perhaps was one of the men considering himself a potential suiter for Rebekah and was ablaze with outrage.

God, using Abimelek, is pointing out, once again, to one of the fathers of the nation he is establishing, the way they should act, and one should view respect and the treatment of a woman/wife. Also

The people of that nation and even us today nationally and personally should be aware of and consider the consequences not just upon ourselves selfishly but the results of your actions and words upon others.

Abimelek – gives his people orders [mercifully], that no one is to harm this man or his wife. Otherwise, they will surely be put to death."

Is this a potential foreshadowing of God in his sovereignty using Abimelek to exercise mercy, much like He will use pharaoh and the hardening and softening of his heart in the deliverances of Isaac's future descendants in Egypt?

I'm sure this whole situation puts the shakes in Isaac, and I am sure he was grateful to Abimelek, but there is no mention of thanks to God.

Perhaps this is part of the mercy that God demonstrates and his faithfulness to his promise regardless to our acknowledgement of it. This underserved grace and provision. We see this by the blessing of Isaac's hundredfold harvest.

Sermon Conclusion

Although there have been questions along the way
What can we take away from this today?

1. We could consider ourselves amid famine of physical, social interaction.

This lockdown on the young and the old is oppressive and frustrating begging for relief. The decline of many people's mental health, leading to depression, loneliness through isolation. A famine of clear guidance from our government and health professionals.

Perhaps we could consider the possibility that we have been in some sense as a church nationally and locally experiencing a spiritual famine of growth, of depth for the last 20 years according to stats and figures.

Are you craving the good old days when things were abundant, or are you waiting patiently for when the famine ends for the new?

Are you waiting on God in expectancy to deliver, restore, provide the rains for new life and growth and direction as to where we are to find water?

Are we craving Egypt, or are we genuinely craving God's blessing of provision and new life where we are now?

Should we not stay focused on him and his mercy towards us in the meantime?

In the meantime, while we wait, do not become complacent!

- Have we stopped our meeting together due to change in form?
- Have we stopped reading and studying His word?
- Have we stopped seeking His face in prayer and meditation?
- Has our passions and affections for him dwindled?
- Have we fallen into a sinful routine in any way?

In the famine is it not wise to seek the one in which all things spring,
In the famine is it not wise to seek the source of all light and life.

2. In the consequences, God is with us.

We should be aware of ourselves and our actions and words.

Our actions lead to consequences not just to ourselves but to others.

This scripture shows us the rabbit hole is potentially a lot deeper than we first imagined.

We are all products of our upbringing and culture, a mixture of Good and bad traits.

This is the importance of self-awareness and repentance.

This is the importance of understanding of being a "New Creation."

This is the significance of "be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

This is the grace and call upon us to be "conformed to the image of the son."

All through faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit to become the people God is calling us to be
Mind, Body, Spirit and heart.

3. God will still see his plan through.

Gods will not overturn his faithfulness to his promise.

But we must not take this for granted like the two sons in the parable of the prodigal son.

Where the father had everything, the sons want, but the sons didn't want the father.

However, one came to his senses and wanted the father which one are you?

Seek him and stay close He will provide what we need when we need it

NOT

What we want when we want it.

So in amidst the famine, I encourage you to be patient, seek God, seek His face, seek a better understanding of the person God is calling you to be and if needs be repent and trust in him.

PRAYER

Extended Notes for

3. When Opposition comes due to the blessing (V12-22)

We read that Isaac plants crops and reaps a harvest hundredfold, his wealth increased, and his flocks grew to such an extent that the local indigenous people the Philistines envied him, because of this his influence increased so in effect they were intimidated by him. So at this point, the famine in some sense had ended, and Isaac made use of the wells his father had dug.

However, the envy of the Philistines and them feeling intimidated they filled the wells up. We see in verse 16 that it wasn't just the locals, but Isaac's wealth and potential influence was challenging that of the King, Abimelech. In which he tells Isaac to go away, you have become too powerful for us.

We are told that he moved to the valleys of Gerar, but this was on the grazing patch of the shepherds of Gerar, and they claimed not only the wells his father had dug but also the new well of fresh water.

It seems that Isaac hadn't moved far enough away.

Eventually, it seems as though he did move far enough away, digs another well which its possession wasn't disputed and Isaac praises God for the space God has given them to grow and flourish in the land.

In essence, he claimed that land and we are told that he moved and stretched his land to Beersheba.

In the situation of blessing, there will always be those who want to stunt your growth. Who want to hinder and put obstacles in your way, stifle your progress and try to oppress you.

There could be many reasons why this happens
Jealousy of your progress which can lead to anger
Conflicting ideas, morals, values, beliefs and world views
Today it could be a sense of entitlement.

This mentality of "if they have it, then I should have it too. But, if I can't have it, then neither should they."

We see this all around us.

this could be the adulterous and sinful generation Jesus talks about in Mark 8:38

Jesus was using adulterous in the form of affections being misplaced on other things other than on God, and that is a Sin against God.

In Genesis 26 we see the world actively seeking to hinder the establishment of God's nation.

In what ways is the world trying to block and stifle the Kingdom of God being established?

- Media Censorship
- Education
- Legislations
- Speech
- Business

What others can you think of?

What do you think we should do about it?

4. The funny things about perceptions (V24-33)

We read that God APPEARS to Isaac and again reaffirms his promise to encourage him, to embolden him against the oppression he had received in an amongst the increase.

But isn't it funny, and I mean funny because I think this is so true of ME and I am sure if you were to reflect on past experiences this would be true of you.

Isaac was sent away by Abimelek because his wealth had increased to such an extent that it challenged His wealth and authority and influence to the people he ruled.

But it seems that due to Gods Blessing of Isaac that even though he had moved far away, his wealth and influence had reached to the territories of Abimelek. Causing Abimelek and the commander of his forces to visit him.

Isaac, quite rightly, and understandably would be, confused, annoyed and potentially frightened to see that abimelek was accompanied by his army commander.

In his words "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?"

What are you doing here? I have done what you asked I went away, what do you want now, what have I done... Is implied.

What we read next is laughable but so relatable.

"THEY," it says in the text answered "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us'—between you and us. Let us make a treaty with you that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now, you are blessed by the Lord."

They grovel to him and make out that they didn't send him away in hostility; instead, it was peacefully. But in verse 16 it says otherwise. It was an abrupt uprooting.

Can you see it?

Have you ever done something to someone and then having to swallow your pride and acknowledge your mistake.

But it runs deeper

The fact that Abimelek was accompanied by his commander tells us something significant that Isaac wealth and lands had grown that he had developed a community around him that might have challenged the philistines militarily. Or it was an implied threat that if you don't make a treaty with us, then the army would be deployed to cut you a peg or two. And yet this wouldn't be consistent with V16 and since then some time has past where he has grown in more power and influence.

Perhaps there is an acknowledgement from the King that the God in whom Isaac belongs is mightier than that of the philistines. We read that in V28. And because of this, they plead with Isaac to do no harm to them. This story is emblematic of how God operates and exercises his influence in the world. The world will bend the knee.

However, there is a slight complication, Abimelek at the end of V28-29 "because we treated you well and sent you away peacefully [they didn't], [but] because THEY did, he [Isaac] was blessed by the Lord.

If we hadn't sent you away, you would not have been blessed - is implied.

Isaac, probably here remembering the tit-for-tat they had, that he couldn't hold out on Abimelek due to his previous deception, sees this as a way to make amends and honour and forgive.

Have you ever been in a situation where you have received mercy?

If you are a believer, then yes you have, an extraordinary amount of mercy, by God.

But in our day to day dealings, when someone wrongs you, you have an option to extend mercy or desire retribution.

However, have you forgotten to remember the mercy you have received and then not extend that mercy to the person who is standing in front of you.

I think back to the parable Jesus taught on the "Unforgiving servant" Matthew 18:21-35.