

Genesis 26:1-6 A Grace of Famine 4/22/18

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ² And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

(Pastor prays)

It is a strange thing indeed to celebrate the goodness of God only when the sky is blue and your way is clear; to speak of God's goodness when the job comes through and the child is healthy; to speak of God's goodness when there's plenty to eat and life is good. I see this too often in the dangerous world of social media where Christian people will air their grievances when they have been wronged (or feel wronged) and then proclaim God's glory when something goes right. Just once I'd like to see someone say, "I lost my job today and thank God for taking me and my family to this desert where I have no choice but to trust Him. I don't know where the money is gonna come from but praise God for the chance to have my faith strengthened." (That's) Because God is not just good when the bills are paid and the kids are healthy and the biopsy is negative. God is good when the cupboards are bare and the car is wrecked and the home is in tension. He's good and His grace is sufficient for you. And if you are carrying the weight of the world – that weight is there to press you into the arms of Jesus so that you will put your hands in the nail-scarred hands and to be reminded God loves His children.

Jesus died for God's children to redeem and secure and forgive you. God is good when there is a famine in the land. That's where we find ourselves in Genesis 26. We are looking specifically at Isaac. Isaac is a lesser luminary in the constellation of the patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Griffin Thomas said of Isaac: he was an ordinary *son* of the great father (Abraham) and the ordinary *father* of the great son (Jacob).

Isaac lived the longest of the patriarchs but less is recorded of him than any of the others. Twelve chapters are dedicated to Abraham and about that many for Jacob and Joseph. But just this one chapter dedicated to Isaac. And in this chapter, his life is a small canvas on which the grace and goodness of God is written in large letters, and that's what I want *my* life to be, and it's certainly what I want *your* life to be. I want you to see that His ways are above our ways and that God is right now working in the events of your life to draw you to a deep and abiding faith in Jesus. I hope you will see that:

God is Exceedingly Good Even When Things Seem Really Bad

There are a few things I want you to learn about God:

God Tests His People

He did it with Abraham in Genesis Chapter 22 and He does it with Isaac in Genesis 26. He does it with Isaac and right now He's doing it with you. All of you. Notice how the story opens in verse 1. *Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines.*

A famine. It hadn't rained, crops dried up and died, animals were starving, and people were hungry. A famine is a slow death. You read verse 1 and you realize Isaac is facing what Abraham before him faced. The author Moses even mentions it and, in so doing, he is reminding us fathers: you are an example to your children intentionally or unintentionally, when you are trying to be an example and when you are not, when you are teaching a lesson on purpose or when you raise your voice at their mother and don't think they notice.

In the text, Isaac is faced with a problem; a serious life-threatening problem. Verse 1 says he reached out to Abimelech – the Philistine. In desperation, instead of going to God, Isaac goes to the Philistines of all people. Why would he do that? Why would he short-cut on solutions instead of seeking the God of his father? But it is what we do as sinful people. Marriage is hard, so some divorce. College is filled with temptation, so we rationalize. People are frustrating, so we blast them on social media. Health is troublesome, so we worry and fret about the test. Every event of every day is a test. Look: *every* encounter, *every* word, *every* glance, tests us. When prosperity comes, a raise or an inheritance, it's a test. Do we become more selfish or more generous? Are

we grateful for the things God gives us, driving us to worship and praise Him more intensely or do we get distracted and ineffective in our luxury? What about famine? When famine comes, do we despair or draw close to the Lord? In the dry time, are you experiencing more of His providing love, or is the test making you hard and bitter or, worse, profoundly sad? Let's think about the apostle Paul for a moment. Remember how he described his test in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9? Listen:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

In weakness. Do you feel weak? It's a test for you to trust the grace of God. That grace has been displayed perfectly in Jesus – His life perfectly lived, His death on the cross in place of sinners, and His resurrection. God is giving you this trouble so that you might, by faith, come to Jesus. God tests His people.

God Leads His People

In the text, Isaac goes to the Philistines and was evidently headed to Egypt like Abraham did and Joseph. Now let's read verse 2-3 and talk about it a little. *And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.* Let's break down how God leads Isaac and how he leads us.

God leads by initiative

In verse 2 - *And the LORD appeared to him.* God broke into his life in an unstoppable and irresistible way. Isaac wasn't looking for God. God came to him in the midst of his hard time. It is the very grace of God that would pursue us even as we run away from Him. And today, God comes to you and appears in the person of Jesus. Isn't that what the writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 1:1-2? *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he*

created the world. The Gospel starts with God who created man who sins. God sends Jesus to die for us, and then the time comes when man must respond. Here is another way God leads.

God Leads by His Word

Look again at verse 2. *And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.* Don’t go down to Egypt. Dwell where I show you. Don’t go down to Egypt. There is slavery down there. There’s oppression and addiction in Egypt. It looks good and they have food but there’s trouble in Egypt. Stay here and trust me.

Some of you are in a drought, an emotional famine, and you’re looking down toward Egypt and God is saying, “Stay with me and trust me.” Even though it’s confusing, a foggy day with God is better than 10,000 sunny days with Satan. Don’t go down to sinful Egypt. Egypt glitters but God is not there. It looks like provision and plenty, and things will get better but don’t go down to Egypt. I know you’re thirsty but if you go down to Egypt, you will be drinking the devil’s brew. It looks like fresh bread down there, but it will turn to ashes in your mouth. Stay in the Lord. I know it’s where the famine is, but stay for now.

I have found it to be a healthy exercise if you can envision where your particular sin will finally land you. What is the conclusion? It ends badly. God leads us by His word, the Bible, that points to the word incarnate – Jesus. Jesus says don’t go down to Egypt. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

God Leads Us by His Grace

Let’s go back to verse 2 and read through 3. *And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your*

father. See the “don’t” then the “do.” Look at verse 3. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. Stay here in the famine where the water is dried up and the food is gone and I’m going to be with you. I’m going to teach you in this hard time what I teach all my children: You have to trust me. Don’t you want to be like Habakkuk who learned in the hard and lean time to say like in Habakkuk 3:17-18,

*Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

The God of my salvation. Back in Genesis we get a hint of how God saves His people in grace. Notice the promises to Isaac in verses 3-5 and what the promises are based on. *Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”*

God tells Isaac, I’m going to bless and save you based on the righteousness of Abraham. Here is grace. Isaac is blessed and saved, not because of his own good living. He is blessed and saved because of someone *else* keeping the law.

Now, this Old Testament picture gives us a New Testament truth on a higher and happier level. The true and better Abraham is Jesus Christ. He kept God’s law perfectly because you and I can’t. He went further. After keeping God’s law perfectly, He took the just wrath and punishment of God on the cross. He did that for sinners, to give sinners like me and you forgiveness and righteousness, so that I’m accepted by God on the merits of Jesus. By grace you are saved.

(Pastor prays)