

Genesis 26: 1-11; “The Lord Testing and Building faith”; Sermon # 75 in the series – “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 10th, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.

Our 1689 London Baptist Confession states that the Lord our God has decreed all things; whatsoever comes to pass, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will. And yet, when we hear this, we should understand that He does this in such a way, that He is neither the author of sin, nor does He do violence to the will of man. This is all very mysterious to us to us His creatures, because God’s ways are far above us. His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. Nevertheless we must try to understand them better because He has many things that He has appointed for each one of us. And it will not do to excuse ourselves from the process of our sanctification, or to ignore what God would have us to become, in our Lord Jesus Christ. God executes His decrees, it says in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, in His works of creation and providence. The Lord by His wise and loving providential ordering of events brings His dear children into situations where He tests and builds their faith in Him. He sometimes even leads them into awkward situations where they are forced to face their fears, in order that they might prove Him to be the all-sufficient God that He has said that He is.

So this morning we want to ask the question: What kind of situations of fear did the Lord permit Isaac to come into, for his good, in order to build his faith? Let me list them for you and then we will look at them one at a time. 1st of all – There was the situation of his fears in relation to the famine. 2nd – There was the situation of his fears in relation to his wife. And 3rd, there was the situation of his fears in relation to a man in authority. I want you to ask yourself as you listen to this message – Do I believe that the Lord can, and that He will, deliver me from all of my fears? May the Lord build our faith and our confidence that He will as we listen to this message.

1st – There was the situation of his fears in relation to the famine. (Verses 1-6)

Our text states the matter plainly – “There was a famine in the land besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham.” I think that it often true that fear is created in our hearts when events occur which are outside of our control, and which God Himself is the author of. You say to me, But don’t famines just happen? Aren’t they something that comes about, without God’s directly bringing them? The answer to that question is no. God ordains all of the events which take place in the world, both great and small, in nature and in the weather. And it is He Who decides if we will be able to grow food for ourselves as well. We do live in a fallen world, but it is not a fallen world outside of God’s immediate and direct control. Instead we should understand that it is all perfectly in His wise control. Let’s prove this to ourselves by taking just a few verses of Scripture. Psalm 105, verses 13-16 would be a good place to look, in relation to our present text.

“When Abraham and Isaac and Jacob went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people, He permitted no one to do them wrong; Yes He rebuked kings for their sakes, saying, ‘Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.’ “Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread.” This is speaking of what happened when God brought Jacob’s family down into Egypt. The means of getting them to go down there was that God “called for a famine in the land”; He “destroyed all the provision of bread.” It certainly is not a vain thing for us to pause and to contemplate in awe and wonder, God’s sovereign control over all the events of our lives; God’s direct and immediate control over all that He provides for us. If we are not doing it now, out of a deep sense of humility and thankfulness, we should pause in prayer at the beginning of each meal and give God thanks for our daily bread, and to thank Him for all of the great variety of food and drink that He gives to

us, to keep us in life and to sustain our lives. And, it is not a vain exercise to pray for future provision as it is given to us in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread".

God destroyed all the provision of bread in that area for seven years, after he had given them 7 years of plenty, to make the way for a famine, based upon what He had prophetically revealed to Pharaoh, and which Joseph had correctly interpreted, and acted upon. He accomplished many purposes in this, but surely one of the greatest was in order to bring Jacob and his sons into a situation in which He would test their faith in him. He would bring great situations of difficulty before them which would let Him know whether they would repent in relation to their former sins. The Lord used a famine to do this. A person may have a great desire to avoid the difficulties of such a thing as a famine, and they may take many steps to escape it, but only God can deliver them, once He has brought them into a place of difficulty such as this; because He has a greater and deeper purpose to accomplish with them; one which will only be accomplished if they are brought into a position of great need.

Isaac was probably afraid of this famine. Indeed, it appears that in his mind that he was making plans to go down to Egypt where he thought that he would find food. But God allayed his fears by means of His promise to Isaac. This is also the way that the Lord allays our fears as well. He does so by means of the promises of His word. God said to Isaac – "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you." "Dwell 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 perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your Father." To us He is saying, "Do not go to the world and its wisdom for the answers to your difficulties." The wisdom of the people of the world, trying to lead you to do things their way, the way that will leave the truth of God's word out, and the godly counsel of His people behind, will not be lastingly profitable to you, or glorifying to Him. It will ultimately lead you into bondage and misery to the false principles of sinful independence. I did it my way will become your slogan. And the people of the world will applaud you, but they will not be able to give you the lasting good, God-glorifying answers to the most pressing questions of your mind. I hope that you will see the importance of learning to abide in God's word, and how important it is to God and to you, that you learn to cultivate faithfulness to His word and to His commandments. When God gives you His commandments He is saying – This is My way, walk in it. He also follows it up with saying – And I will be with you to bless you.

This is God's way. It was God's way for Isaac and it will be His way for you as well. Don't let your fears lead you to run away from God's commandments to you. Don't think that the counsel of worldly people is the answer to the deepest needs of your mind and heart, or even the provision for your body. Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness which is only found in His Son, our Lord Jesus; and all of these material things that you need will be added to you. Cultivate faithfulness where He has placed you, and He will give you every good spiritual grace that you will need to do His will, and to be satisfied in doing it. He will also be the One who will convince you if you need to move geographically.

I hope that you see, from what I have been telling you, that you don't need to run away from your home and your family in order to find God's good will for your life. Learn to do His will right where you are and He will bring to you everything that you truly need. God knows how to lead you, but the real question is – Will you follow His lead? For He is the One who will open doors for you which will unfold the rest of your life, so that that you can live your life without the regrets of having flown against all the godly counsel that you have received in order to find your own way apart from God's good way. And you will have this verified to your own mind and heart by God's good Holy Spirit if you are praying – Lord, lead me on a level path, for Your name's sake. You will find that if it is God speaking to your heart and mind, it will always be in accordance with the good principles of truth, which are found in His written word, and He will be teaching you what would be best for you in relation to His church. It should not be your

selfish desires for worldly comfort and ease, or your personal pleasure and supposed happiness apart from God and His word, that prevail over you, in the decisions that you make.

2nd – The Lord brought Isaac into the awkward situation of fears in relation to his wife. (Verse 7)

“And the men of the place asked about his wife.” “And he said, ‘She is my sister’; for he was afraid to say, ‘She is my wife,’ because he thought, ‘lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold.” Here we find Isaac using the same sinful expedient that his father had used twice before to save his own skin. In Isaac’s case it was even less justifiable because he had no doubt heard of these things from his mother and perhaps his father as well, and there simply was no excuse for it in his case. But sometimes people will follow the one bad example of their parents, even if their parents have confessed that this was a sinful mistake, that they made in the past. Fear will lead even godly people at times to hedge on telling the truth so that they will protect themselves.

I think that we need to understand that this was a test that God was giving to Isaac. God had just appeared to him and told him not to go down to Egypt. One of the reasons was no doubt to protect him from the very thing that he was now afraid of, but Isaac couldn’t see it. He did not remember that God could see all the hearts of the men in that place and knew all the possible situations of harm that could come to him and to Rebekah. He was God, the One who had stuck the house of Pharaoh with plagues for Sarah’s sake and came to the Abimelech of Abraham’s day in a dream in the night and told him that he would be a dead man if did not restore Sarah to Abraham. These were 2 separate incidents. Surely Isaac must have heard something of this. But it is evident that he simply did not believe that God would be able to protect him in this new and unknown situation.

When the men of the place asked him about his wife, his fears got the better of him. He may have heard of a man or men who had been killed because their wife was beautiful, and this fear was something that played upon his mind because of what might happen to him, or to Sarah if he was dead. And his lying in this way was something that Rebekah would have to go along with and lie herself. All this deception because of Isaac’s fears which came to him because his wife was beautiful. John Trapp says, “Beauty therefore is not much to be desired, or the lack of it to be bewailed; because it creates so many dangers to them that have it, and their dearest husbands.” But let us think about this again, in light of the promise. If God had said that he was going to “be with him and bless him as he dwelt in this land’, then why should he fear? Sometimes our fears are legitimate, and we should act upon them to protect ourselves immediately. We should pray about the fears that come to us, and we should ask the Lord to show us what we should do that would be in line with His Word.

We also need to realize that sometimes our fears are something which we have built up in our mind, because we think of what might possibly happen to us. These kind of fears prey upon our minds to the place that if we do not deal with them by faith’s good reasoning, we will be tempted to lie about something that we do not need to lie about. Fear is meant in God’s overall design of things to lead us to trust in God. Psalm 94, verses 16-19 say, “Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?” “Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?” “Unless the Lord had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence.” “If I say, ‘My foot slips,’ Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up.” “In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.”

Isaac should have been reasoning in this holy way, but his fears had paralyzed him. Isaac should have inquired of the Lord and asked for wisdom from Him. The Lord tested him in this way to show him his weakness, and through his failure to bring him to the place where he would see that God would protect him, and also Rebekah, from all evil. The question will always be, in situations of fear: Will I trust in the Lord? Psalm 56: 3 and 4 say, “Whenever I am afraid, I will

trust in You.” “In God (I will praise His Word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear.” “What can flesh do to me?” Psalm 121: 7 says – “The Lord will protect you from all evil, He shall keep your soul.” “The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and forever.” This was something that Isaac had to learn the hard way.

3rd – The Lord permitted Isaac to come into a situation of fear with regard to a man of authority. (Verses 8-11)

Sometimes it takes a long time for the truth to come out that we have hidden, but we should understand that in regard to believers that it will come out, if the Lord wants it to come out. It says in verse 8, “Now it came to pass, when Isaac had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife.” True marital love has a hard time hiding itself. I like the King James rendering of this better. It says Abimelech looked out the window, and saw, and there was Isaac “sporting with his wife”. The text does not spell out what he was doing but I think that you are wise enough to understand that he was probably holding her close and kissing her. He was rejoicing in the wife of his youth. He was laughing and cuddling with her.

The Hebrew words say, “He was Isaicing” with his wife. By the way Gentlemen, those of you who are married. I believe that what Isaac was doing showed that he had a healthy and flourishing love relationship with his wife. He was still showing playful affection to his wife and they had been married for probably about 40 years. He was doing what would have been very normal for a man and his wife to have been doing, in the privacy of their home, but somehow he could not keep his affection private in the place where they were. Perhaps he thought that no one was looking, or perhaps he forgot himself, but God would have Abimelech look out his window at precisely that moment. Abimelech looked, and he stood amazed. Here was an incredible thing! He was going to have to investigate this matter, and God would have it so.

God permitted Isaac’s sinful concealment to be uncovered. But he did so in a way that showed how much that he loved Isaac as one of His Elect. He allows the very man who is in the position of authority to discover it and to reprove him over it. We should understand that God knows how to deal with the sins of His Elect so that they will be duly reprovved, so that they will learn the lessons of truth and righteousness. Is it not amazing that He used this heathen king to do it; the one who appears was trying to understand more of the true and living God? God used this man to reprove Isaac; the one who should have known better than to hide the fact that he was married. So Abimelech calls Isaac and says to him directly, “Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac says to him, “Because I said, ‘Lest I die on account of her.’” Now for the reproof. “What is this that you have done to us?” “One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us.”

You see how skillfully Abimelech states his reproof. Isaac’s fears were based on what might happen to him. He thought that he might be killed by some unscrupulous man who wanted his wife. Now he shows Isaac how his sinful acting upon his fears, to lie about Rebekah being his wife, actually brought him to the place where he could have “brought guilt upon the people of the land”. We need to understand that if we lie about how things actually are with us, that our lies will lead others to act upon what they believe is true concerning us. Our lies may unwittingly lead them to commit sin against us, or others, based upon the testimony of our mouth. This is a very dangerous thing for any person, especially if a Christian falls into it. God will reveal the folly of it. Abimelech knows human nature pretty well. He says – “One of the people might soon have lain with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us,” he says.

This is not the way that a Christian should behave. And Isaac stood justly reprovved. Abimelech is better to him than his fears however. And Isaac no doubt gloried in the fact that this also was according to the will of God. Abimelech charged all of his people saying, “He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.” He could have told him to get out and

stay out of his land, but I think that He perceived that even though Isaac had acted wrongly in this thing, that Isaac's God was helping him in these things. He would protect Isaac because the Lord was causing him to see how to administer this good reproof to Isaac, and thus he prevented sin from taking place under his charge. It is an early indication of how God would use kings to protect his ancient people Israel. Isaiah 60: 10 says – "The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have had mercy on you." We will see in sermons to come that Abimelech was being led wisely by the Lord to be a great help to God's people who had come to him. God was showing Isaac that He would be better to him than his fears, forgive all of his sins, and instruct him in righteousness.

It is for each Christian man to become like the Lord Jesus Christ in regard to the integrity of their heart and the protection of their wife. It says in Ephesians 5: 25 – "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." This Isaac could not do at this point. When he was younger, he was willing to be sacrificed by his father at God's command, but at this point he could not lay down his life for his wife. It only shows us, that he, like all of us, needed the grace of Christ to do the right thing in relation to his fears. This is why I would admonish each one here to trust in Jesus Christ when you are afraid. Ask Him for the grace to be delivered you when you might be tempted to lie, and also that He would deliver you from all your fears. And then, you will find, that you will be able, even as Christ laid down His life for the Church, to be able to give yourself for your wife.