

The Promise Kept and the Promise to Come

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[0:00] And good morning, church. We're going through the book of Genesis.! We've been going through Genesis, Abraham's story.! For the last two months, we've been tracing through Abraham's story.

! And this week, we've been waiting for something. We've been waiting for something the last two months. And this week, we're finally here. We finally made it. We're finally here.

In Genesis chapter 12, two months ago, we started hearing about Abraham's call God called Abraham in Genesis 12 to go leave his father's house, leave the land that he came from.

And God gave him a promise. I will bless you. I will make you a great nation. I will give you land.

And we see later in Genesis 15 that he will have offspring.

He will have a son from his own flesh that God will make into a great nation. The problem, though, was that Abraham Abraham was 75 at the time that God called him.

[1:02] His wife, Sarah, was 65. They were old. They didn't have child. They were barren. Who has a kid at 75? Who can have a kid for the first time at the age of 75? But that's the promise that God gave them.

They're forced to wait. But they grow impatient. In Genesis 16, 10 years afterwards, they're tired of waiting. And we heard how Abraham and Sarah, they take matters into their own hands.

They do it themselves. Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham. And they have a son, Ishmael. They have a son. So did their plan work?

Did Abraham's plan to take God's promise for himself work? It looks like it. They had the son they wanted, Ishmael. But we read 13 years later in Genesis 17, God says, no, it's not through Ishmael that this promise will come.

Ishmael is not the son that was promised. The promise will come through Sarah's son. And you will name him Isaac. And we've spent two months going through the story.

[2:06] We've been waiting two months, exploring this theme of waiting in faith for two months. It was two months for us, but it was 25 years for Abraham and Sarah. 25 years of waiting.

25 years of disappointment. And when you wait for something so long, there's expectations that come with it. There's anticipation, excitement builds, hype builds.

So actually myself, I'll be flying off to Toronto tonight for a few weeks. Toronto is where I'm from. I'm going back to visit home. Which reminds me of actually when Jollibee's opened in Toronto for the first time in 2018.

You guys know what Jollibee's is? Fried chicken chain from the Philippines. And when it opened, the hype around it was crazy. It was insane. I heard the first, I didn't go because I'm not Filipino, but the first guy in line at Jollibee's, he waited, he set up a tent in the freezing cold, literally sub-zero temperatures, waited there for 17 hours.

17 hours for some fried chicken. Not just him. Thousands of others waited in line. Not just on the first day, grand opening day, but for weeks, literally weeks, you'd have to wait a few hours in line to get some fried chicken.

[3:31] Why is that? Why? It's because in the Philippines, Jollibee's, it's not just chicken. It's not just fried chicken. JP knows. It's pride.

It's identity. It's a national treasure, right? Are you really Filipino if you don't defend chicken joy with your life? And so, the guy in line who was interviewed, one person in line was interviewed, and he said, they asked him, why are you waiting?

Why are you waiting so long here? And he said, it's because he's been away for the Philippines for years. He was from the Philippines. He moved to Canada. He's been away for years.

And finally, he's able to have a taste of home. At last, years later, he can finally have a taste of home. And that makes that 10-hour wait worth it for a taste of home.

And that's the kind of anticipation we've been building. There's this wait, years of waiting, leading up to Genesis 21. And finally, the wait is over. It's time for Isaac to be born.

[4 : 37] It's time. The promise is here. But will it live up to the hype? Will it live up to the expectation, anticipation that's been building? Let's see. And I'll, we'll, let's stand together as we read from Genesis chapter 21.

I'll invite Annabelle and Teresa to come up to read for us, please. We'll be reading the whole of chapter 21, when Isaac is born.

Genesis chapter 21. The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.

And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son, Isaac, when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me.

[5 : 40] Everyone who hears will laugh over me. And she said, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have born him a son in his old age. And the child grew and was weaned.

And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham laughing. So she said to Abraham, cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac. And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you.

For through Isaac shall, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.

So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

[6 : 47] When the water and the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bow shot. For she said, let me not look on the death of the child.

And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy. And the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, what troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation. Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.

And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

A treaty with Abimelech. At that time, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, said to Abraham, God is with you in all that you do. Now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity.

[7 : 59] But as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear. When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, Abimelech said, I do not know who has done this thing.

You did not tell me and I have not heard of it until today. So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech and the two men made a covenant. Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart.

And Abimelech said to Abraham, what is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart? He said, these seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.

Therefore, that place was called Beersheba because there both of them swore an oath. So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

[9:14] This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. So again, Abraham and Sarah, we've been waiting 25 years.

They've been waiting 25 years for Isaac. And it's been a wild ride. We've been going through the last 10 chapters or so. It's been quite a wild ride. They laughed.

They cried. They lied. They fought a war to save Lot. And it's all building up. It's all building up to Isaac's birth. And if this were a movie, you would expect like drama, detail, music, fireworks, anything, because this is what it's been building up to.

But when it comes to the actual event, when Isaac is born, the description we have, all we get is this. The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.

And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. There's no drama. There's no description. It's like, this thing just happened.

[10:25] We've been building up to it, and then it just happened. He's born. Let's move on. It's not quite what you'd expect from the climax if this were a movie. It's like what we're getting is this EDM song that builds, but then there's no drop.

Or it's like when LeBron James, he hyped up this TV special, The Decision, and then he just slipped in. I'm going to take my talents to South Beach. There's all this anticipation, and it's a letdown.

Or our very own dear, not LeBron James, he's, you know, he's always talking about matcha lattes, these strawberry matcha lattes. So one day, I went to try it. I went to try it. And this is probably the last sermon he'll let me preach, but I'm sorry.

It was, it wasn't that great. It was fine. I have nothing against strawberry. I have nothing against matcha, but it's not, it wasn't worth the hype. And that's what I feel like when I read the description in Genesis 21.

Because after 25 years of waiting, why is there so little detail? We just get that Isaac is born. Why does it feel so uneventful? And I think reading this, meditating on this, it's, I think it's because God doesn't want to distract us from what's important in these verses, in this event.

[11:40] He doesn't want us getting caught up in the details because there's only one detail that matters here. And that is, the Lord fulfilled his promise. God did what he said.

Notice the repetition here in these verses. As he had said, as he had promised, at the appointed time, that's when Isaac was born. 25 years of waiting, anticipation built up.

It wasn't to Isaac's beautiful baby shower. The flowers, the decorations, the cupcakes. He looks so cute. No, there's one point only here. The Lord did exactly what he said he would do, exactly when he said he would do it.

And that's all we need to know. God fulfills his promise. Isaac was born as God had said, as he had promised, at the time that he said. That's what God does.

He says it, and he does it. We can take God at his word. God fulfills his promise. And so that's what we'll be exploring today. We can trust God because God is trustworthy.

[12:44] We can have faith in God because God is faithful. And we see this in the three stories that we have today. We read three sections in Genesis chapter 21. Isaac is born.

That's what we've been waiting for. Also, we get this, the scene of Ishmael, Abraham's other son, being cast out, kicked out of Abraham's family.

What do we make of that? And also, Abraham, he makes a treaty with King Abimelech at the end of the chapter. And in all these stories, in all this, we see that God is good. He is faithful.

He can be trusted. And so we can put our faith in him. We see that as Isaac is born. It happens just as God has said. It happened just as God had promised.

Even though it seemed impossible. At this point, Abraham was 100 years old. Sarah was 90 years old.

[13:42] And for someone to be born, for a child to be born, for the first time, from parents that old, it's simply not possible. It's biologically not possible. It's a miracle.

It's a work of God. And that's why Sarah says in verse 7 here, she says this, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Who would have thought?

Who would have imagined this possible? Yet, I have born him a son in his old age. A 90-year-old woman given birth. That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard.

Who would believe it? And that's why Sarah laughed. Remember in chapter 18, in Genesis 18, when God told Abraham and Sarah, I will return to you about this time next year.

And Sarah will have a son. And when she heard it, she laughed. I'm old. I'm past menopause. It's not possible. She laughed. I can't have a kid.

[14:40] And then we read that scene. And then God asked her, why did you laugh? And she said, no, I didn't laugh. God said, yes, you did laugh. Sarah laughed a laugh of skepticism, bitterness, unbelief.

Sarah, you'll have a son? Me? No way. That's what Sarah thought. And so here, it's funny that God told Abraham to name his son Isaac.

Because there's a play on words here. You'll see a footnote in your Bible that the name Isaac means he laughs in Hebrew. Yitzchak. He laughs.

The name Isaac is from the word laugh. To laugh is to Isaac. There's this word play here. So as we read this, we can replace the word laugh with Isaac to see what's going on here.

Like Abraham called his son Isaac. Abraham circumcised Isaac. He was 100 years old when Isaac was born. And Sarah said, God has made Isaac for me. He has made laughter for me.

[15:40] Everyone who hears will Isaac over me. There's this repetition of laughter throughout this passage. Isaac's name is a reminder of laughter. But now, it's a different sort of laughter.

It's a redeemed laughter. Sarah, in chapter 18, that was a laughter of bitterness, incredulity. Will this actually happen? I can't believe it. But God turned that skeptical Isaac into this Isaac of joy, this laughter of joy.

God made Isaac for Sarah, and now everyone will Isaac enjoy it with Sarah. He took Sarah's laughter of discouragement and despair and turned it into Isaac who lives as proof that God keeps his promise.

He is good for his word. He does the impossible. A hundred-year-old, a nine-year-old woman bearing a child. He does the impossible for our joy and for his glory. And that's what God does. He takes what's irredeemably broken and redeems it. He takes our sorrows and turns it into joy. True joy. Eternal joy. Solid joy. And I love the verse in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 17.

[16:51] It says, this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. It's not that, and notice what that verse says.

It's not just that the reward we have is greater than our suffering now. But that verse says that our suffering is preparing for us. It's working for us, creating for us incomparable glory.

What we're going through now is preparing glory for us, preparing joy for us. Because if Sarah, if laughter, if Isaac was born to Sarah at the age of 30, she wouldn't laugh the same way she does now at the age of 90.

She wouldn't have that same joy. She wouldn't see God's hand the same way as she does now. But in the decades of waiting, she learned that God keeps his promises and he does the impossible. That waiting prepared her to receive her laughter, to receive Isaac and give glory to God for it. And it's true for Sarah just as it's true for us.

[18:00] And we said before, waiting time isn't wasting time. Even if we don't laugh in this life, in our waiting, in our heartbreak, we have this promise of God that he is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

That's his promise and we can take God at his word. God's faithful makes us respond both with joy and laughter and also with obedience.

And that's how Abraham responds. Seeing God's promises fulfilled, he obeys God in faith. Look at verse 3. In verse 3, Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, who Sarah born to him, Isaac.

Abraham obeys what God told him to do in chapter 17. When God gave Abraham the promise, he told him, you will have a son and told Abraham, you will call his name Isaac.

And Abraham here obeys. Because why wouldn't he obey God? Why shouldn't he obey God? If God is a God who turns sorrow into joy, then why wouldn't Abraham want to obey and have a reminder in naming his son Isaac, that is a reminder that God gives him that he gave Abraham laughter.

[19 : 21] Why wouldn't Abraham want to obey and have this reminder of God's faithfulness? And that's the same reason why we obey God. Why we obey God in faith and pursue things, for example, like spiritual disciplines, to read the word, to pray, to gather together in worship as we do today.

It's in faith that God brings us joy. God is worthy. He's worthy of our trust. He's worthy of our worship. Abraham wasn't like, oh man, I have to name him Isaac.

Man, he's forcing me to name my son something. No, Abraham's attitude is, God has given me laughter and I will hold onto that joy and obey.

Abraham also obeys in verse 4. It says, Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old as God has commanded him. Do you notice that?

As God has commanded him. That sounds like something we read before. Abraham did as God has commanded him. It's flipped around of what God did. You see, God, the Lord, did as he had said.

[20 : 26] And if God does as he has said, then we also can do as he had said. If God acts as he has promised, then we can also obey as he has commanded.

That's what Abraham did. God can be trusted. He keeps his word and so we can keep his word. That is our good. We can trust God and obey.

And so, that's Isaac's birth. That's the long-anticipated, awaited birth. It's been built up to show us that God fulfills his promise.

He's good for his word. And so we can rejoice and obey him. God took Sarah's bitter laughter and turned it into joyful laughter of Isaac.

He fulfilled his promise. But, when God brings joy to our life, sometimes our past mistakes, they can come back and challenge it. And we'll soon see here a different sort of laughter from the results of what Abraham and Sarah did in chapter 16.

[21 : 30] Let's read in verse 8. Isaac grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. So weaning, we like to throw 100-day parties when you have a baby.

In Hong Kong, we like to throw 100-day parties. Well, Abraham threw a party when Isaac was weaned. That's when babies start eating solid food instead of drinking milk. That's what it means to be weaned.

And they did that a bit later when babies were a bit older back then, about when Isaac was two or three years old. So Isaac's about two or three years old at this point. And that's when we see another sort of laughter in verse 9.

It says, Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian whom she had borne to Abraham laughing. The son of Hagar was laughing.

So that's Ishmael, the son of Hagar. He laughs. And what is this laughter? He is, it's not an innocent laughter. It's not a happy laughter, a joyful laughter.

[22 : 28] He's making fun of Isaac. He is laughing at Isaac. He's laughing in mockery as the footnote in your Bible says. He's laughing in mockery.

We know Ishmael's up to no good. It's not a good laugh because in the New Testament in Galatians 4, verse 29, it clarifies that Ishmael, born according to the flesh, was persecuting, attacking Isaac, who was born according to the spirit.

So there's this competition that happens. We saw this earlier in chapter 16. There's this conflict, competition between Sarah and Hagar. And we see this again between the son of Hagar now and the son of Sarah, between Ishmael and Isaac.

And so Sarah is furious. She's upset. And she sees what Ishmael is doing to Isaac, that laughter.

And so she says to Abraham in verse 10 here, she says, cast out the slave woman with her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.

Now, this isn't the first time that Sarah got mad at Hagar. It happened in chapter 16. And remember, this is after Sarah had this bright idea.

[23 : 43] It was Sarah's idea in the first place. Hey, Abraham, you go sleep with my servant Hagar to have a son. We're going to do it ourselves. We're going to do it our way to take hold of God's promises for ourselves.

They did it their way. And that led to conflict back then. And it's coming back to bite them again now. And so Sarah says to Abraham, get rid of Hagar and Ishmael.

But in verse 11, this was very displeasing to Abraham. It was very displeasing to Abraham. I mean, of course it was because Ishmael was Abraham's son.

He wasn't Sarah's son, but he's Abraham's son. And Sarah is asking Abraham, get rid of your son. Kick your own son, your firstborn son, out of your house.

So obviously, Abraham is displeased. He doesn't like that idea. But surprisingly, God tells Abraham to listen to Sarah in verse 12. He says to him, be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman.

[24 : 48] Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you. Do as she tells you. Now think of what God is asking Abraham to do. He's asking Abraham, send your firstborn son, not just kick him out of the house.

Like here, if you're kicked out of the house, I'll maybe rent a hotel. I'll go to a friend's place. But they were in the wilderness. They were in the desert. To kick Ishmael out of the house is to send him into the wilderness, into the desert, where he's going to have to fend for himself, where he'll be in danger, where who knows what's going to happen to him.

It's a dangerous thing. But we see that God has three good reasons to ask this of Abraham. It seems harsh. It seems maybe even cruel, even when we hear about this.

Think of what Ishmael and Hagar will go through. But we see, even in this event, God is faithful to them all. And God has few good reasons to ask Abraham to do this.

Which, in a way, all relate to actually what we'll be reading next week in the next chapter. Because we talked about how Isaac's birth was hyped up and anticipated. We've been waiting 25 years for it.

[25 : 59] But when we read through a bit further, we see that Isaac's birth isn't actually the climax, the peak of Abraham's story. That comes in the next chapter, in chapter 22.

What we call the binding of Isaac when Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering on the altar.

I mean, there's a lot to that. We'll unpack that more next week. God actually eventually stops Abraham from going through with it. But what we see, what we can keep in mind today is that God has in store for Abraham an even greater test of faith than he's going through today in this story. And in preparation for that, first, God removes any backup plans in Abraham's mind. He gets rid of any plan B's, any safety nets, any backup plans in Abraham's mind.

God tells Abraham, the promise will come through Isaac, not Ishmael. That's what he says in verse 13. Whatever Sarah tells you to do, do as she tells you for through Isaac, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be named.

[27 : 12] It's through Isaac that's the son of promise. And because remember, after Ishmael was born, it was only another 13 years before God appeared to Abraham in chapter 17 and told him that Sarah would have a son of her own, Sarah would bear Isaac.

So possibly for 13 years, Abraham operated under this assumption that the promise was for Isaac. He could have thought that. He could have thought that his own efforts to do it himself, it actually worked.

He actually got what he wanted. He had the son. Ishmael was born and they made it happen themselves. But God tells, he makes clear to Abraham now, it's not Ishmael but Isaac.

My blessings to you will come not by your own efforts, not by any works of the flesh, but by my promise and my power alone. And so, in chapter 22, when God tests him, Abraham can't rely on the son born from his human efforts.

All he can do is trust God at his word, trust God's promise. With Ishmael out of the picture, there's no plan B. It's do or die for Isaac. Abraham can't rely on his works and only can rely on faith in God.

[28 : 26] God takes that plan B out of the picture. Second, God gives Abraham here practice in obeying him. It's not easy always for us when God commands us.

God calls us to trust and obey. Abraham's something difficult to do. He had to send off his firstborn son. He didn't want to do it. It was difficult for Abraham. It was even more difficult for Hagar and Ishmael.

Abraham knew that. That's why it was hard for him. But yet, Abraham obeys. In verse 14, rising up early the next morning. In verse 14, he rose up early the next morning as soon as God told him to do what God told him to do.

Next week, when we read chapter 22, you'll see that phrase again, that Abraham, when God called him, commanded him to go with Isaac, he rose up early the next morning.

when God called him to act. This is practice. This is preparation for what he'll do next. And so Abraham obeys and sends Hagar and Ishmael off into the wilderness with just a little bit of bread and a bottle of water, a skin of water.

[29:33] And they go around and wander in the wilderness. And soon enough, we hear that the water they took with them, it runs out. They only had a skin of water, a little bit of water.

And soon enough, it runs out. And here, we might not think that much about water because we can always, we can turn on the tap, you can go to the store, buy a bottle of water, but they're in the desert.

There's no faucets in the wilderness. There's no 7-Eleven. And without water, in the heat, you die. And now here, they've all run out. So what are they going to do? What can they do?

Slowly, they lose their strength. They're getting thirstier. They're thirstier. They're getting weaker. And there is really no hope. There's no option. They can't do anything.

They're going to die. They have no water. And they're going to die. And so Hagar, they're in despair. Hagar, in verse 15, she thinks it's the end for him.

[30:31] She puts Ishmael down by the bushes. Reason is, she can't bear to watch him die. As a mother, she can't bear to watch her son take his last breath.

And so she goes off. She says, let me not look on the death of my child. She sets in the bushes and she walks off. But not too far, only the distance of a bow shot. Because on one hand, she loves him too much to watch him die.

But on the other hand, she loves him too much to just leave him there alone and die. So she goes off into a short distance. They're in despair. She cries out and wept. And they wept.

And once again, we see that God is good for his word. We see that God is faithful. He is good to us. Verse 17 says, God heard the voice of the boy.

In their moment of despair when they had nothing to do, Isaac and Hagar, they cried out to God. And it says, God heard the voice of the boy. And there's also some wordplay here too because if you remember Ishmael's name, Ishmael's name means God hears.

[31:41] It means God hears. And we don't see Ishmael's name mentioned here, but we see that God heard the voice of the boy. Ishmael happened to Ishmael.

That's what, that's what happened. God heard Ishmael. And so in, in verse 17, God opened her eyes. God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of water.

That was a miracle. They, they're in the desert. There's no water and suddenly they looked up and there is a well there the whole time. And she, she filled the skin. She filled the bottle of water, gave the boy to drink.

God was with the boy, it says, and he grew up. So when we look at this, do we see God's grace here? See God's grace to them here.

And there's, there's something here because Ishmael wasn't the child of promise. Ishmael was the one that God asked even to cast out of the house, send Ishmael away.

[32:40] He was the kid that, who, who mocked, despised Isaac, the chosen son. But still, even still for Ishmael, God shows grace to him and saves him.

And not only that, but he fulfills that promise as he promised in verse 13, I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also because he is your offspring. Even to the one who was cast off out of Abraham's house, God was good to.

And, and this is what we're meant to see here. That if God was gracious to Ishmael, who was outside of the covenant, who was kicked out of Abraham's house, if he was good to Ishmael, then how much more will he be gracious?

Will he be good to Isaac? Who is the child of promise? If God provided for Ishmael, then how much more will God bless Isaac through whom the promises to Abraham will come, through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed?

And so later, when Abraham, he can look back on this example of God's faithfulness, that if God would protect Ishmael, if God was good to Ishmael, excluded from the covenant, how much more will he protect Isaac when God calls him to give him up?

[33:59] God didn't abandon Ishmael. And yeah, he opened Hagar's eyes to see this well of water. And this leads us to the final scene here.

Hagar needed water, but also Abraham needs water to survive in the wilderness, in the desert. And here in this final scene, he'll have to negotiate with King Abimelech and fight over a well that he had

dug up.

Look at verse 22. It says, At that time, Abimelech and Fickle, the commander of his army, said to Abraham, God is with you in all that you do. So Abimelech and Fickle, they come to Abraham and they notice this.

God is with you, Abraham, in all that you do. Now, think back to last week in chapter 20. Remember that name, Abimelech.

Who is Abimelech? Abimelech was the king that Abraham had lied to. Last chapter, we talked about the cycles. Abraham fell into the same sin that he committed in Egypt in chapter 12.

[35:04] Did the same thing again. He was afraid. He was fearful of what Abimelech would do. And he thought that Abimelech would think Sarah was very beautiful and take him as his wife.

And so he lied. He said this half-truth and said, Sarah is my son. My sister. And so that brought God's judgment upon Abimelech and on his whole kingdom. That's what we read last week in chapter 20.

But yet, Abimelech comes back and says to Abraham, God is with you in all you do. And yeah, we talked about the cycles in our spiritual life of the highs and lows in our lives.

We see ourselves slipping into the same sins again. Abraham was a coward who sold his wife out. But yet, God was with him. Yet, God was with him.

And that shows us it's not by our efforts. It's not the strength of our walk with God. By our efforts. That's not why Abraham, God was with Abraham there.

[36:03] No, Abraham sinned. He was fearful. He was afraid. He didn't look to God. But, God was still with him. That's the promise. That God shows us grace despite our sins.

That's the good news. That's what Abraham was met with. Yet, God's grace doesn't just forgive us. It transforms us also. God meets us in our sin, but he doesn't leave us there.

Abraham lied to Abimelech in chapter 20. But now, Abraham, Abimelech comes to Abraham to make a treaty with him. He's looking to Abraham to keep his word now right after Abraham lied to him.

Abraham's becoming someone who can be trusted. God's faithfulness to us produces faithfulness in us also. And, before they make their treaty, Abraham takes this opportunity to hash out this dispute with Abimelech about water.

Water's important because they're in the wilderness. And just as Ishmael ran out of water without a well, Abraham will also run out of water. He won't be able to stay in that area without a well and he'll have to move out of that land somewhere else.

[37:13] He can't stay there without a well, without water to access. And it says that Abraham had earlier dug a well in that area, but Abimelech's servant took it. And so Abraham confronts Abimelech about it.

And they come to an agreement. Abimelech agrees that he will recognize that the well is Abraham's. They deal kindly with one another. And as a witness to this, Abraham offers seven eulams to Abimelech.

In verse 30, it says, these seven eulams you will take from my hand that they will be a witness for me that I dug this well. And therefore, that place was called Beersheba because they, they're both of them swore an oath.

And there's, there's a bit more wordplay here also. Beersheba means well of seven. So Sheva is seven, but it can also mean oath. So they settled this oath with seven eulams and say, they call this Beersheba, well of seven, well of oath as a witness that the oath was made between them.

Now that name Beersheba also tells us something important about where Abraham is at the moment. Beersheba is a name that comes up later in the Bible.

[38:24] It marks the southern border of the promised land. Later, for example, in Samuel chapter three, verse 20, it talks about how all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba in Samuel three.

It's kind of like saying, if I say all of Hong Kong from Saikong to Lantau, right, Lantau on the west, Saikong to the east. Beersheba is on the edge of the promised land in the south.

And that's where we find Abraham here, on the edge of the promised land. Now, remember God's promise to Abraham. He promised to give Abraham a son, to make him into a great nation.

There's a promise of a son, and there's also this promise of land. There's also the promise that he will have land. So, in the 25 years of waiting, in the 25 years, we see part of God's promise fulfilled.

We see it's fulfilled in part, that Abraham now has the promised child. He has Isaac. God gave him Isaac, just as he had promised, as he had said at the time that he had said, but yet, we see the other part of the promise is not yet there.

[39:37] Abraham still doesn't have the land. He still doesn't have the promised land. Abraham, he has his well in Beersheba, but he's still a foreigner. He's still this foreigner who has to negotiate with this foreign king for water.

The promise is fulfilled already on one hand, but on the other part, not yet. The promised child, but not the promised land. But yet, let's see what Abraham does.

Let's see what Abraham does in verse 33. It says, Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.

Planted a tree in Beersheba and called on the name of the Lord. So he planted a tree. Why a tree? I have a few plants at home and I'm not an expert at plants.

I actually forgot to water them this week. But you don't have to be a gardener to know that it takes time for plants to go. It takes years, decades. Trees don't grow overnight.

[40:37] Trees take time to grow. And once they grow, they could last for 50 years, 100 years. There's something future looking, forward looking, from this act of planting a tree.

It will be years, decades before he can sit under the full shade of the tree. And this tree will provide, it will be good for future generations, for decades, for years.

And that's why he plants it. Why does he do it though? It's because he's planting it in faith. He's planting it. Even though he's a foreigner, even though he doesn't own this land, even though he's just a sojourner, he has to negotiate with a foreign king.

He trusts that God will fulfill his promise. God will give me the land. He will be good for his promise. And not only did he plant the tree, he worships there and calls on the name of the Lord there, the everlasting God, El Olam, the everlasting God.

That is also an act of faith, trusting that God in the future will do what he promised. The everlasting God can fulfill everlasting promises. Even if this tree takes time to grow and Abraham doesn't fully see it, even if this tree outlives him, God's promises will outlast his lifetime.

[41:47] He planted this tree in faith. He was sitting on the edge of the promised land, holding the child of promise, but still foreigners living in tents. He had the promised child, but he was waiting for the promised land.

And that is exactly where we are today, too. That's our situation here today. Because if waiting 25 years for Isaac seemed a long time, the world, we waited thousands of years for the true child of promise, for Jesus to come into the picture.

And we see that Jesus has already come. He came 2,000 years ago. We have this promise on one hand. Jesus came in the flesh. He died on the cross for our sins, just as God has said.

And he rose on the third day, just as God had promised. And all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. We have this already because the promised child has come.

God's promise of the already and the not yet. We have God's promise already, but also not yet.

[42:54] The kingdom of God is here already, but we don't see it fully in its entirety. We know we have the Holy Spirit. We have this guarantee of our inheritance. We have access to God through faith in Jesus.

But we know just like after Isaac is born, there's still conflict. There's still brokenness in this world. We still live in that cycle of sin. We still live thinking, why do I still do the same thing that I've been doing for decades?

Why is there still brokenness in my life? And it's because we're living in foreigners, as foreigners in the promised land. This world is not our home.

We desire a better country, a heavenly one, the city with foundations, whose designer and builders is God. We see in this world the brokenness, and that's a reminder that this isn't our home.

We're longing for a taste of home. Just like Abraham planting a tree in Beersheba. We live now between the ready and not yet. How do we do that?

[43:57] How do we live in that tension? We can follow Abraham's faith. We can follow Abraham's faith. First, remember. That's what Abraham does.

Remember. Look back and remember God's faithfulness. How did Abraham have faith to plant this tree and worship? You can look back to the beginning of the chapter.

Isaac was born just as God had said, just as God has promised. And so we can look forward and trust that he will inherit the land in the future, just as God has promised.

He did it before and he'll do it again. When we look at our lives, what's a promise, what's a problem that we have now? What's something that is making us anxious now?

Maybe it's finances, where to live, conflict with someone, or that cycle of sin that we still live in.

When we see that in our lives, let's face it with faith, like Abraham.

[44 : 58] Look back at our lives. Remembered when we prayed for something, when we waited. maybe 25 years like Isaac. And God answered, and we said, at last, at last this came.

If he was faithful then, he will be faithful now. And the thing that we can look back to the most, the solid hope that we have, is we can look back 2,000 years to what Jesus did on the cross, and know that if God gave us his son, if he was willing to do that, if he was willing to send his son to die for us and rise from the dead, if I can trust God with my soul, and I can trust him with anything else.

If God went through all this pain and effort to save me, then he will surely take me home. He won't waste that. He will finish the good work he began in me and take me home.

We can hold on to that promise. We remember, and also we can rejoice. We can rejoice. When we remember, that should move us to worship. Like Abraham, when he saw God's promise fulfilled, Isaac came, something that was impossible, he laughed, and he called on the name of the Lord, El Olam, and worshipped the everlasting God with joy.

And we also, when we see God's promise fulfilled, we can rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. God's faithfulness moves us to worship with joy.

[46 : 23] And also, we respond. We respond in obedience. Abraham obeyed, named his son Isaac, circumcised his son Isaac, and he obeyed, and he responded by worshipping and planting this tree.

What are we relying on to build our home here? God told Abraham, it's not through, your future won't be through Ishmael, not through your efforts, but only through my grace and promises.

Where are we trying to manufacture our security? What are our backup plans? And we trust Jesus will come again. The call today is don't be satisfied with what's here and now.

Don't be like Lot's wife, who turned back, whose hearts were tied up with this world that's going up in flames. But to look forward to the city to come.

And when our eyes are set on heaven, that moves us to obey. Are we investing all our energy into temporary homes, into tents? Or are we planting seeds in the kingdom of heaven, planting trees like Abraham?

[47 : 39] That might look like discipling the next generation in Kidswell at GU, knowing that it might take years to bear fruit, could be giving sacrificially to support people, spreading the gospel to people we will never see in our lives, in places that we will never visit, but that we will see in eternity.

What will we sow in light of eternity? And that wait might feel long now. It was 25 years for Isaac. It was a thousand years for Christ.

And we're still waiting. We're waiting for Christ to return a second time. But we know there's one thing for sure, that Christ has come and he will come again.

One day, this wait will finally be over and it will be worth it. It will be better than a bite of Jollibee's, better than a matcha latte because we won't just get a taste of home.

It won't just be a taste of home. We will finally be home. We will see him face to face in his presence with fullness of joy. God has promised and we can take him at his word.

[48 : 48] So let's follow the footsteps of Abraham and faith between the two promises and trust and live with faith. Let's pray.