The sermon

Intro

Sometimes the Bible's a broken record. A broken record is a record that's stuck and keeps repeating the same lyric or rhythm over and over again. You need to move the needle to get it unstuck.

Genesis is kind of like a broken record. Promises are repeated. Over and over again. Man's failure repeats itself. Over and over again. Multiple times we're pointed to a singular offspring of Eve in whom all the nations will be blessed, namely, Jesus Christ.

Sometimes the Bible wants to emphasize something. So it repeats itself. There's a pattern we need to observe. So we need repetition.

I won't be re-reading a previous sermon this morning. I've tried to incorporate some new insights for you. But I will remind you of things of said previously. Because history keeps repeating itself in Genesis. And the covenantal promises given to Abraham keep popping up.

Body

Passage Focus

Two points. We'll work through the passage in two stages.

READ 26:1-11

Point 1: When people are big and God is small (26:1-11)

[This is the title of a book by Ed Welch]

Famine

There was a famine (a shortage of food) in the land (26:1). This is a different famine than the famine in Abraham's day (Gen 12:10).

Relocation

Because of the famine, Isaac relocates to Gerar (south-west Canaan, western Negev), where Abimelech is king of the Philistines (26:1).

When Abraham was 100, he had encountered King Abimelech of Gerar (Gen 17:17; 20:1-2). That was approximately 80-90 years ago (Isaac was 60 when Esau and Jacob were born [Gen 25:26] so it's 60 years plus however old Esau and Jacob are). So most commentators believe this is a different King Abimelech, maybe the son or grandson of the first Abimelech, with the same throne name passed down.

God has a command for Isaac: don't go down to Egypt; stay in the land of Canaan (20:2).

Promises/covenant restated

Promises previously given to Abraham are restated to Isaac (26:3-5). There's one condition: ***"Sojourn in this land"*** (26:3) = Isaac will be blessed so long as he stays in Canaan. Blessing will be experienced in the land. Likewise, Abraham was promised the same things, if he first went to Canaan (Gen 12:1-3).

The blessings restated are (26:3-5):

1. "I will be with you"
2. "I will bless you"
3. "to your offspring I will give all these lands"
4. "I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven"
5. "in your offspring [= Jesus] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed"

Why? ***"because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."*** – 26:5

Isaac is blessed on account of Abraham's prior obedience. The promises are sure and certain. The people of Israel will one day dwell in the land. One day Jesus will arise on the scene to live a sinless life and die for the sins of the world. People from every nation will experience God's blessing in Christ. On the other hand, it seems like Isaac's experience is conditional on where he lives, but not conditional on his behavior.

What's happening? The covenant promises have been transferred to Isaac (Gen 17:18-21).

Response

"So Isaac settled in Gerar." – 26:6

Isaac obeyed. **Gerar** = south-western Canaan near Gaza.

History repeats itself

Isaac repeats Abraham's sin. Fearing the Philistines will find Rebekah attractive and kill Isaac to free her from her husband, Isaac lies, saying she's my sister (26:7).

Unlike the two accounts where Sarah was taken, no one takes Rebekah for their harem. After Isaac and Rebekah had dwelt in Gerar for a long time (26:8), Abimelech observed Isaac ***"laughing with Rebekah"*** (or "playing with Rebekah"). Whatever they were doing, it was clear they weren't brother and sister.

Abimelech's outrage

Abimelech calls out Isaac for his deception. Why did you lie (26:9)? ***"Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'"*** Because I thought you were a bunch of really wicked guys who would kill me to take my wife. Isaac had a high opinion of the Philistines.

Abimelech objects. Isaac, you placed our people in danger. One of my men could have lain with Rebekah, a married a woman, and thus been guilty of adultery. Then we would have been guilty of a grievous sin (26:10). It's tough to know exactly what Abimelech thought, but he believed in a powerful being that sees all and brings wrath on adultery.

Previously, Abimelech had a dream, was told he was a dead man for taking Sarah, was struck with some disease, and every woman in his household was made barren (Gen 20:3, 17-18). Either the same Abimelech or he heard the stories.

Abimelech then institutes a death penalty for anyone who touches Isaac or Rebekah (20:11). He recognizes that Isaac and Rebekah were under God's blessing. To mess with them was to mess with God.

Interestingly, pagans retained the death penalty God instituted with Noah (Gen 9:6). God instituted the death penalty for murder. Abimelech instituted the death penalty for harming those blessed of God.

Application

How shall we connect this incident with our lives? Previously I applied it like this:

1. When the world calls out the church

Once again a pagan king calls out God's chosen recipient of blessing. Abimelech gives Isaac a lesson on morality. Abimelech lambastes Isaac for the wrath that could have brought on the people because of Isaac's actions.

We Christians are a witnessing people. Called to be salt and light. Practically, we need to beware of how our behavior discredits God. Yes God remains infinitely glorious and good and true regardless of our behavior. Our hope is Jesus, not the behavior of our fellow Christians. But we can make the church look unappealing. We can make the new birth look untrue. We can justify stereotypes. Or we, by the grace of God, can make church look appealing, make the new birth seem true, and demolish the stereotypes.

Be on the alert, fearing God, so that you don't discredit God's word. When you fail, be an exemplary repenter. And help them see how you fight your sin and rest in God's forgiveness.

2. Fear overpowering faith

Isaac saw a beautiful wife and a wicked people. He made a connection. They'll kill me because of her. So I must lie.

What he didn't see was God's promise. What he didn't see was God's sovereignty. He didn't see God's ability. He didn't see God keeps his word. He only saw his circumstances. Faith wasn't in the equation.

When we fear man, we take our eyes off of God. When man becomes big, God becomes small. What's the antidote to the fear of man? A big view of God. And a small view of man. When Isaac saw man as big and powerful and dangerous, God became small.

Isaac didn't see God's ability to protect. But there was ample proof. The massive wealth and possessions and people Isaac inherited from Abraham was ample proof of God's ability. If Isaac was logical, he would have said something like: "These people are dangerous, but I've seen the way God blessed my Dad. Nothing short of miraculous. If God was able to do that for my Dad, God can surely protect me from these puny men. God is able."

Sin never makes sense. Sin is illogical. Given who God is, his perfections, his character, his abilities, faith is always logical. Remind yourself frequently that God created the world by speaking it into existence. Remind yourself God rose Jesus from the dead. God is able!

Fearing people makes us susceptible to sin. It doesn't have to be limited to lying. When a teenager feels the need to fit in, they might go to a party and get drunk. When a Christian is accused of being intolerant and judgmental, they might stop speaking the gospel. When a Christian is afraid of the consequences of telling the truth (parent will spank me, Christians won't think I'm as godly as I appear), they might lie. The antidote in each and every case is fearing God.

The Christian who trusts God believes God is for them and eternal life is sure and certain. For the Christian, fearing God isn't fearing his rejection. To fear God is to believe he's big and powerful and to be in awe of his wrath and to respect him accordingly. To treat him as Creator, Ruler, Judge. We fear God by respecting his rule. We trust him when we see a big God who blesses his people.

We make bad choices when we're afraid. We'd make better choices if we feared God.

Can you think of a time in your life when fear overpowered faith? When man was big and God was small. What happened? How would things have been different if faith overpowered fear? If God was big and man was small.

Practical question: Where in your life today is man bigger than God?

READ 26:12-35

Point 2: When people get angry with the blessed (26:12-35)

God's blessing

Isaac remained in Gerar. God prospered him (26:12-13). Sowing and reaping ***"in the same year of hundredfold"*** means quick return, abundant return. Too much too quick. Supernatural. God was keeping his word. Isaac stayed in the land. God prospered his farming.

Envy

Also ***"flocks and herds and many servants"*** (26:14). But blessing had its challenges: ***"the Philistines envied him"*** (26:14). As a result they:

1. Filled all his wells with dirt (26:15).

Note the extent: every well. They stopped his water supply.

2. They told him he had to leave (26:16).

Why? God's blessing was elevating Isaac above the people of Gerar.

Opposition alongside blessing

Isaac complies with Abimelech's desire and resettles nearby in the Valley of Gerar, re-digging Abraham's wells (26:17-18). Digging uncovers a flowing water source; the Gerar herdsman say, ***"The water is ours"*** (26:19-20). Isaac's servants dig another well; another dispute (26:21). Isaac digs a third time; no dispute (26:22).

Isaac ascribes the water source and the end of disputes to God: ***"For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land"*** (26:22).

Visionary experience

Isaac relocates to Beersheba (26:23) where God appears to him in a visionary experience. Promises are repeated:

"I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." – 26:24

Isaac builds altar (place of sacrifice), sacrifices animals, and calls upon the LORD (26:25). Thanksgiving, praise, requests, etc.

Covenant sought and made

[*People also say how could it be the same Phicol 80-90 years later?]

History repeats itself (Gen 21:8, 22-32). Abimelech wants a covenant with Isaac. Why? Same reason as before: ***"we see plainly that the LORD has been with you"*** (26:28; see Gen 21:22).

Here Isaac calls out Abimelech, accusing him of hatred (26:27).

The covenant is a non-aggression pact: ***"that you will do us no harm"*** (26:29). Here Abimelech lies: ***"have done nothing to you but good"*** (26:29). What about the wells? What about disputing water sources?

In any event, the covenant's made (26:30-31) and blessing continues: more digging, more water (26:32).

When family brings grief (26:34-35)

Esau married women from Canaan are became a polygamist.

"and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah." – 26:35

ESV footnote: "they were bitterness of spirit"

These two women troubled the hearts of Isaac and Rebekah. Because these two women were in their lives, Isaac and Rebekah were miserable within.

Sometimes our soul is troubled because people are in our lives. Their actions, their words, their indifference to God, their selfishness, the damage they do to others, when we suffer the consequences of their foolish decisions. Those God has placed in our lives can ravage our hearts. It's a sad reality of the fall.

RECAP

Isaac's opposed. God blesses Isaac. People envy Isaac. So they sabotage his wells and demand that he leave. God keeps blessing Isaac with water sources, so they dispute ownership.

Isaac keeps finding water. The dispute ends. In the end, Isaac's opponents concede Isaac's blessing and request a covenant. Isaac keeps finding water.

Promised blessing didn't require the elimination of opposition. Blessing didn't require the elimination of trials. Blessing kept on coming during opposition. Eventually the opposition ended. To a watching world, blessing was evident on Isaac's life.

Application

The one who is uniquely blessed by God is not spared from envy or destruction of property or people wanting him gone or people disputing ownership. Blessing doesn't mean the absence of hardship. Even for one given abundant, supernatural prosperity. Christian, biblically, you can't say I'm not blessed by God because hard things are in my life. Blessing exists alongside hardship! Blessing isn't the absence of hardship!

For Isaac, blessing created opposition. It's not out of bounds for people to envy you because of promotions, solid finances, wisdom, relational peace, inner peace, other fruits of the Spirit, etc. Because of envy, people might do things to you that make life hard.

Isaac didn't fight back. Isaac kept giving up ground. God kept blessing. Eventually his opponents wanted a truce. Sometimes people get angry when they see a person blessed by God. Sometimes people recognize God's blessing on a person's life and the hostility subsides.

Christian, people are watching your life. What do they see? If we're a Christian, we're blessed by God. They'll see something. Sometimes they'll want it for themselves.

I'm not saying the world needs to see a perfectly obedient Christian to see a blessed life. When we fail, we need to be exemplary repenters. Got this from a conference sermon in Louisville. There the preacher said elders are required to be exemplary repenters, because all of us struggle with sin. What makes a person an example to the congregation is how they do battle with their sin.

Practical question: Can I see God's blessing on me when life is hard?

Conclusion

To fear God is to respect God. To respect his authority, his word, his holiness, the purity of his being and his hatred for sin. To take God seriously because of what he's done (e.g., flood, Sodom and Gomorrah.

To fear God is to stand in awe of his power and his wrath towards sin. Sin meaning doing life our own way, not God's way. Rejecting God's commands. If you aren't a Christian, if you haven't trusted in Christ and repented of your sins, if you haven't been born again, the right stance towards God is fright and trembling. A fear that because your sins haven't been forgiven, you're storing up wrath for the day of judgment. A fear that, if you don't repent, you will be subject to unending existence in a place characterized by "weeping and gnashing of teeth." A place of intense sadness, loss, fright, and anger.

How do we move from fright to trust? This morning we've learned that God blesses people. God does people good. Who does God bless? Those in right relationship to God. Those who've recognized their rebellion. Those who concede their guilt. Those who've recognized Jesus is their only hope of right relationship with God.

On the cross, Jesus died as a substitute such that whoever believes will experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life and come under God's blessing. We can't take away our guilt. We need someone to take the punishment in our place. That's where Jesus comes in.

If you trust in Jesus, not yourself, your sins will be taken away and you'll come under God's blessing and you'll have nothing to fear in terms of the wrath to come.

God hates sin. God punishes sin. God extends mercy to those who trust in Jesus. Those who trust in Jesus come out from God's wrath and into his blessing. God forgives and blesses rebellious sinners. That's the good news! Trust Jesus.

Tell is if you believe.