



[3]SAPLING

Story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Sermon – Melville Junction

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- In this section we are looking at God indentifying a people through which the nations will be blessed.
- The story starts with God working through a family line Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God makes a promise to them.
- This is a promise about **descendants, land** and the **blessing of all nations**.
- I want to pick up from the story of Abraham, when he is about to sacrifice his only son...
- **Abraham has walked a long road with God up to this point.**
- He **left the land of his father** and settled in this land because God told him to.
- He has **tried to make a plan for God** by having a child through his wife's servant Hagar because his wife (Sarah) was not able to have children.
- **Yet God made a promise to Abraham that his offspring will be numerous.**
- Abraham was a **100 years of age** when his wife gave birth to their son Isaac.
- **So here he is**, his only son the only **child that can fulfil** this promise and God has asked him to sacrifice this son.
- **What would drive someone to follow through with that?**
- **Someone told me the other day** that they are happy to follow me or submit to my leadership in the church. If I say jump, they will jump.
- It got me thinking about **why someone would say that** and I think it is this...**trust**.
- **I am not going to ask somebody to jump** off a cliff or put them in harm's way.
- **And I am just a man...fallible.**
- Here is Abraham, a man **who has walked a road with God** to the point where he can know that **God's intention is not to harm him**. That God is true to His word and that **He is just and fair**.
- The story of Abraham and Isaac is the **story of our lives... God has shown himself to be loving and faithful to us**.
- But at times He **has asked us to trust Him with that which is precious to us**, be it our **children** (family members), our **possessions** our **careers** or even our **desires** (like sex, drugs, wealth, fame etc)
- **He asks us to lay these things down**, and we hold them in our hands before God...
- **What do we do, do we trust God** – that he wants the best for us, that He is a good, loving and faithful God?
- **Or do we show our true colours** in these times - we profess to love and trust Him but we don't actually.

- This is what this section of the bible is about, **God teaching a people to have faith in him, to follow his ways and his commands.**
- At the end of this story Abraham's faith in God was merited... God goes on to bless Abraham like this:

"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as **numerous as the stars in the sky** and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will **take possession of the cities of their enemies**, ¹⁸ and through **your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed**, because you have obeyed me."

- Abraham **died at a good old age**, among his large family in the land that God told him to settle in.
- In some of these stories (about Abraham) you start to see that the people living in the land around Abraham are also **blessed because of him.**
- We have been asked to have **faith in Jesus – What does that mean?** - To put our trust in him. To have faith that following Jesus (the way of self sacrificing love) is good for us, is God's intended plan for us and that it is a plan to prosper us not to harm us.
- **The story of Abraham gives us a richer clearer understanding of this faith.**
- To do the things that God asks of us because we trust Him.
- **It is an active faith.**
 - ❖ Let's move onto **Isaac**...at this stage Isaac is **married to Rebekah.**
 - ❖ A servant went back to Abraham's home (the home of Laban) to find a wife for Isaac.
 - ❖ The servant went to a well outside this town and asked God to show him who Isaac's wife should be.
 - ❖ Along comes Rebekah, all goes according to plan and she accompanies the servant back to the land.
 - ❖ Isaac is married and settles **in this land of his father Abraham.**
 - ❖ We pick up the story in **Chapter 26:2 -6**

¹ Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. ² The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. ³ Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." ⁶ So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

- ❖ **What is going on here**, Isaac living in the land of his inheritance, a promise from God.
- ❖ Even though there is a **famine**, God has asked him to **stay in the land** of his inheritance, God gives Isaac the **same promise** he gives Abraham.
- ❖ **The land, descendants as numerous as the stars, all nations will be blessed through his offspring.**
- ❖ **What does Isaac do?**
- ❖ **He trusts God** and stays in the land even though there was a famine.
- ❖ The thing that **Isaac teaches me here** is this, God has given us an **inheritance**, He has given us his kingdom, here and now.
- ❖ **Our inheritance has borders...** and sometimes we feel like there is a **famine**, a poverty of life inside our inheritance, the land to the east has so much more to offer.
- ❖ One of the things Jesus **asks us to do is to love our neighbor as we do ourselves...**sometimes that can seem like a very **dry and unfruitful place.**
- ❖ Let's look at some of the things we do:
 - **Porn** - sometimes a purity of sexuality seems like a dessert, porn offers us the allusion of greener pastures. But what are we doing, we are degrading the precious gift of sex that God has given us to share with our wife or husband. We are spoiling that relationship that God gave us and said that this is the best way for us to live...would you like your wife or husband to treat you in the same way?
 - **Money or career driven** – sometimes the life we currently have can seem a little bit barren. The cars other people drive, the houses they live in seem to be so much more appealing than ours... We work excessively to try and obtain that “better life for our family”. But this is often at the expense of the better life of family and relationship that God has given us...How would you feel if your spouse chose her career over spending quality time with you. Or, how would we feel if our children abandon us when we get older to chase after a career. Is that not what we currently do to them?
 - **Autopilot** – not living every moment in the now, we switch off to the mundane life around us waiting for the next piece of life that we choose to live. God has given us every moment of every day. (Talk about my family). Imagine your family got so bored of you that they switch on to autopilot to pass the time when you are around. Snap out of it, appreciate the time we have been given...start to enjoy these precious moments because they are our promised land, our inheritance.
 - **Forgiveness** – sometimes forgiveness can seem like a waste land...we don't want to live there. We choose to live in the lush green pastures of unforgiveness? That does not make sense... to live in a place of forgiveness is our inheritance, we forgive much because we have been forgiven much.(talk about how forgiveness is good for us)...Conclude Isaac.

- Let's look at **Jacob**, before his name was changed to Israel.
- **Jacob is an interesting character... there is a lot we can learn from him**
- **Jacob is born a twin**, the younger brother of the pair with his older brother Esau.
- Esau was a hunter and Jacob liked to stay home around the tents. Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew on day when he is hungry...Jacob seems to be quite shrewd.
- When Isaac is getting old and can't see so well, Rebekah and Jacob come up with a plan to cheat Esau out of his blessing.
- They deceive Isaac into giving his blessing to Jacob when he thought it was Esau.
- Esau becomes angry and vows to kill Jacob.
- Rebekah hears about this and comes up with a way to send Jacob away to protect him.
- Jacob is sent to the house of Laban to find a wife...this is the land outside of the promised land.
- On this journey, Jacob rests in a place called Bethel – where he has a dream about a stairway to heaven and He sees God in his dream... let us pick up the story here.
- **Genesis 28:13-21**

I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ... ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God

- This sounds **promising to Jacob**, however, when he goes to find a **wife things start to go wrong**.
- Jacob meets Rachel at the well outside the town...he wants to marry her but is told that seven years of labor will be the price, after seven years he is cheated and given her older sister Leah.
- He is then made to work another 7 years for Rachel. All in all, Jacob works for Laban 20 years.
- **What has happened to the promise?**
- **Let me fill us in on the rest** of the details of this story...
- When Rebekah was pregnant with Esau and Jacob, God spoke to her and told her that the younger will rule over the older...God told her but she did not trust him in it.
- She made her own plan (with Jacob) just in case God was not true to his word.
- Jacob cheated his brother and now he is being cheated...our actions have consequences.

- But the interesting part is this, **in those 20 years** – Jacobs descendants became many, Laban became rich because of Jacob (he was blessed because of him) and Jacob amassed for himself wealth.
- **In spite of him living out the consequences of his actions, Gods promise to him was still being fulfilled.**
- **Jacob just could not see it.** It was as if **he needed those seemingly difficult years to grow his character** and to teach him to **trust or have faith in God.**
- At the **end of those 20 years God tells Jacob to go back to the land...**what does Jacob do?
- **He packs his stuff and leaves,** he listens and obeys – the trust relationship is restored.
- **Does this sound like life for you and me now?**
- God has made promises...**The promise of abundant life, that He will love us and never forsake us. That we are heirs and conquerors, that we are sons and daughters of the most high God...**
- The list goes on, but **we find ourselves in difficulties,** facing hardship.
- **Life is tough, where are these promises.**
- The **story of Jacob helps us understand these promises** in light of the **choices** we make.
- Do we trust **God and follow his wisdom** or do we try to **force his hand** by short cutting the process – in so doing demonstrate **our lack of faith.**
- Is the hardship we face bringing us to a point where **our character is being shaped for the task ahead.**
- **God has a plan for us...**we show through our actions that **we are not ready** for that plan and are thus **taken the long way around... Being made prepared...**
- **All this time though, God's promises are sure and are being carried out.**
- **We often only notice it after the fact.**
- The **patriarchs** show us **how God interacts with us,** but more importantly **how we need to respond to him.**
- They help us understand **what it means today to have faith in Jesus.**
- **It is not about saying you believe or saying you have faith.**
- But about having **faith, showing it through our actions** and our choices.
- **Trust God, stay in the place of our inheritance, hardship in our lives does not mean that you are outside of the promises of God...because His promises are trustworthy and sure**
- **Prayer**