

“Emmanuel: Our God is with Us”

Genesis 26:1-33

December 4th, 2016

In his poem “A Psalm in a Hotel Room,” Christian author and educator, Joseph Bayly, wrote about his feelings of loneliness that we can all identify with:

“I’m alone, Lord, all alone. A thousand miles from home and there is no one here who knows my name, except the hotel clerk, and he spelled it wrong. There is no one to eat dinner with, laugh at my jokes, listen to my gripes, be happy with me about what happened today and say, “That’s great.”

No one cares. There’s just this lousy bed and slush in the streets outside between the buildings. I feel sorry for myself and I have plenty of reason to. Maybe I ought to say I’m on top of it, praise the Lord, things are great. But they’re not. Tonight, it’s all gray slush.”

Have you ever felt that way? Of course you have; I have, and it seems it happens more in recent years. Well-meaning people saying they’re praying offers little short-term relief...no words seem to bring cheerfulness. For sure, the longer I go into life in this sin-filled world, shepherding other sinners, slogging along burdened by their sin in addition to my own - the more often I’m tempted to respond in a similar, disheartened way.

Hard times often take prominence here on earth. Yet, so do good times. Scripture offers incredible hope because God has condescended...He has stooped to earth...and He has come through on His promises over and over. Our God is faithful, and He has come to us.

The passage before us this morning isn’t among those first considered when looking for teaching on God being with us. **Isaiah 7:14** is often consulted (“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”) So, too, is **Matthew 1:23** (today’s call to worship). But, in today’s text, which from a human perspective features Abraham’s son Isaac; we again see the ‘Immanuel Principle’ emphasized; God’s promise to be with and dwell among us.

Genesis 26:1-33:

“There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar.

²Then the LORD appeared to him and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. ³Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

⁶So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. ⁷And 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.” ⁸Now it came to pass, when he 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. ⁹Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Quite obviously she *is* your wife; so how could you say, ‘She *is* my sister?’”

Isaac said to him, “Because I said, ‘Lest I die on account of her.’”

¹⁰ And Abimelech said, “What *is* this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us.” ¹¹ So Abimelech charged all *his* people, saying, “He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

¹² Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. ¹³ The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; ¹⁴ for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.”

¹⁷ Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. ¹⁸ And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.

¹⁹ Also Isaac’s servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. ²⁰ But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying, “The water *is* ours.” So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that *one* also. So he called its name Sitnah. ²² And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, “For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

²³ Then he went up from there to Beersheba. ²⁴ And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, “I *am* the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I *am* with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham’s sake.” ²⁵ So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

²⁶ Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army. ²⁷ And Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?”

²⁸ But they said, “We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. So we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you,’ ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You *are* now the blessed of the LORD.”

³⁰ So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹ Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

³² It came to pass the same day that Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, “We have found water.” ³³ So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city *is* Beersheba to this day.”

It’s often easy for readers of God’s Word to get caught up in the personalities mentioned, and in so doing, forget the God Who orchestrates all that takes place in the narrative. So, we’ll look “behind the scenes”, so to speak, and behold Scripture’s God and what He says.

MP 1 – Emmanuel in Hard Times (v. 1-11);

MP 2 – Emmanuel in Good Times (v. 12-25);

MP 3 – Emmanuel in Our Time (v. 26-33)

The first 11 verses in today’s text teach that God is Emmanuel – **God with us in hard times**. This chapter begins with a famine (v. 1); *haven’t we been here before?* Abraham and Sarah endured a famine (**Genesis 12:10**) that sent them south to Egypt. In today’s passage, the famine mentioned doesn’t seem to be as severe as the first; Isaac is said to go only as far as Gerar. But, famines create great hardships for people since food is scarce and everyone needs to eat.

Yet, scarcity of food wasn't the only hardship Isaac and his family endured. Fear was another hurdle. Having moved to Gerar, verse 7 reveals, "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."

Isaac feared that the men of Gerar (Philistines) would harm him or his lovely wife Rebekah, so he told everyone that she was his sister. Isaac thus lied. He held forth deception. He was no different than his father Abraham when God placed Him in a similar situation.

And, as typically happens when God's people attempt to hide their sin, their transgression is exposed. Sometimes, it is uncovered by God or His people, and other times from unlikely sources. Such is the case in today's passage. Verse 8 reports that Abimelech "looked through a window" and saw Isaac "showing endearment" (caressing) Rebekah. The king calls for an audience with Isaac, and rebukes him for giving the impression that Rebekah was his sister. She was actually his wife. The king's concern was the law required a penalty for those committing adultery in the ancient Near East (Laws of Eshnunna and the Code of Hammurabi). The sentence for adultery was death. And, it is often the death of marriages and families in our day. Isaac was exposed, and that by a pagan.

Yet, sandwiched in between famine and fear is God's promise to be with Isaac and his descendants. Verse 3, "Dwell in this land (Gerar), and **I will be with you** and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father." Then in verse 4, God also promises Isaac innumerable descendants, the land, and blessing to all the nations of the earth. In so doing, God repeats His promise first made to Isaac's father Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3**. The promise now continues on with Isaac and his family.

That promise winds its way to us, fellow Christian. We are included among the great prosperity God brought to Abraham, Isaac and, as we'll see in upcoming chapters, Jacob and his spiritual posterity. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are a child of Abraham. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in his letter to the churches in Galatia (**Galatians 3:29**), "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Not only is God **Emmanuel in hard times**, but He is also **Emmanuel in good times**, too.

We see Isaac prospering in the midst of famine in verses 12-14. He sowed in the parched, famine-laden land, and he reaps *in the same year* a hundredfold! Verse 13 gives the progression of prosperity – Isaac prospered, he continued prospering, and became very prosperous! In the midst of famine! Only God could bring such abundance about in such times of lack! Not only this, Isaac had possession of flocks, herds, and a great number of servants as verse 14 teaches us.

In addition, Isaac was able to find water everywhere he dug wells as verses 15-23 teach.

A second statement of God's presence is found after the account of re-digging wells in the Promised Land, and being shooed away by the Philistines. Jump down to verse 24 – "And the **LORD** appeared to (Isaac) the same night and said, "I *am* the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for **I am with you**. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."

Isaac's response to God's Word is important for us to note. *What happens immediately following in verse 25?* Isaac worships God. He builds an altar for sacrifice, and He calls on God's name. God's people are quick to realize that God is always good to them, even in the midst of very difficult circumstances, but especially so when they witness His Word coming through on their behalf. His promise is corporate, and so is His worship. It simply cannot be replaced or replicated in a fishing boat, golf cart, or deer stand.

So, God is Emmanuel in hard times and good times. He is also **Emmanuel in our time.** In the face of God's abundant goodness to Isaac, Abimelech took notice and came to Isaac and entered into a covenant of peace with him. This is an early example of **Proverbs 16:7**, "When the LORD takes pleasure in anyone's way, he causes their enemies to make peace with them."

A third statement of God's promise to be with His people is found in the midst of verse 28 – "We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you." Isaac lived a transparent life before a watching world. He was consistent, and He must have been humble. His demeanor and speech made a watching world take notice. His life was notable in that it pointed to God, and not because the world showered him with accolades of how accommodating he was to positions contrary to God's Word.

What about you, dear ones? What does our secular and unbelieving culture say about you? Do you non-Christian family members and friends say that they have seen the LORD is with you? If so, you are opening avenues of ministry with others. If not, why might that be? Because God is Emmanuel in our time, and not just so to Isaac in the distant past, or Isaiah's time, or when Jesus ministered with the twelve apostles, we're not isolated from a God who sits on some distant throne. He came to be with us. When Joseph and Mary called their son by name, it was a reminder that God was in the house – literally living under the same roof. And that reality can bring great comfort at times when you are tempted to despair, to fear, or to strike out in anger.

Sometime ago, in the *New York Times Magazine*, Nancy Raine told a story she heard 25 years earlier from a friend named George.

In those days, work crews marked construction sites by putting out smudge pots with open flames. George's 4-year old daughter, Sarah, got too close to one and her pants caught fire like the Straw Man's stuffing. The scars running the length and breadth of Sarah's legs looked like pieces of jigsaw puzzle.

Some years later, in the third grade, she was asked, "If you could have one wish, what would it be?" Sarah wrote – "I want everyone to have legs like mine."

When we suffer pain, we want others to understand. We want others to be like us so they can identify with us. We don't want to be alone. We don't like to feel afraid or be made fun of.

God understands. When Jesus came to earth, the Christmas Babe, He did something far more difficult than having legs like Sarah's. His life, death, and resurrection from the dead are of inestimable eternal benefit for the people He came to earth to save.