

Genesis Series

Faith in Trials 2

Genesis 26

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It would be good, loved ones, if you have a Bible if you will turn to Genesis 26. That's the chapter we're studying. We have been going through the Old Testament chapter-by-chapter to learn about the life of faith. It might be good just to mention again what we did mention last Sunday when you look at that first sentence there in Chapter 26, "Now there was a famine in the land," and it is very important for us to see that there is nothing that is lasting that is created by sight. Nothing that is lasting is created by sight.

And I think it's very easy for us to get used to the things that happen naturally among us, that happen by sight, that just come about through the normal relationships that we have with each other. And we think that that is a glorious work and of course that in the glorious work, that is the kind of thing that can happen from men just organizing together or woman just organizing together.

But the only thing that really lasts is that which is created by faith. There is always famine in this present world and God has arranged it thus in your own life. There will always be famines coming -- there will always be difficulties and trials coming in because God is determined to wean us away from dependence on the world itself. Loved ones, the things that happen to us through the actions and events of the world are never lasting things. And it is dreadful, it's very hard for us to get away from that feeling, you know. We kind of would love it just to go kind of naturally.

I mean, we get a good job, and we begin to earn some money and save, and get a nice house, and it should go on just beautifully up and up on a golden staircase until you just tiptoe right into heaven without hardly knowing it. But, if we went that way we wouldn't be ready for heaven, and we wouldn't like heaven. We would be like C. S. Lewis' people, who get into heaven and we find it's like hell to us. [The Great Divorce, 1945] And the only way to be fitted for heaven is for God to separate us from the world that we see around us and to learn to walk by faith. So, repeatedly God allows famine to come into our lives.

I don't know, loved ones, I just think we have to begin to realize that that's the way God makes us grow up and enables us to come into places where we would be able to live. I don't know if you saw those old camels out there that Steve showed us, but who wants to go there? I mean, it's just terrible looking. Or, you even see Ted and Kathy in Beijing and it's kind of romantic in a way but still you feel -- there they are in that room and they can't go out and talk to somebody in English. In fact, they can't talk to anybody about anything unless they really arrange it very carefully. And it seems that anything that is achieved for Jesus has to be achieved by men and women determining to walk by faith and not by sight. I think it will be so in our own lives. I think it will be so in our body here, as God begins to create something beautiful. It'll be through our faith and it won't be just through our sight.

I know it's hard for me to learn that and I'm sure it's hard for you to learn it. So that's what we're talking about. We're talking about the work and the achievements that God brings about in our lives through faith. And you remember, the chapter we started it, we just got a little way down,

“Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went,” as Abraham did about 80 years before, “To Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the Lord appeared to him, and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.’”

In Verse 3, “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you.” It’s like Jim’s song, you know, “Cover me.” Here’s God saying, “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you,” I will cover you, “And will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves.” And God promises to Isaac all these things to encourage his heart. And if you and I are going to walk by faith, we’ll need to have quiet times with the Father when we allow him to speak to our hearts and to reassure us of all the promises that he has for us.

Loved ones, we’ll need to begin to walk by the promises of God. And often you’ll need that very strongly because the appearance of things will not be too encouraging. And God wants you to spend time with him in prayer until the reality of his situation and his promises become overwhelming to you. And it’s just good to remember this. One of the great promises that he’s given us, in fact, it’s more than a promise it’s really something that he has already done it’s in Ephesians 2:4.

Ephesians 2:4, “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” And it’s so important to see that Verse 6, “And raised us up with him.” That is when God raised Jesus up, at that very moment, he raised us up with him and he made us sit with him, with God, in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And God has already done that.

That is where we sit tonight. That is our place with God, at his right hand, in Jesus in the heavenly places. That’s what the Father says. He says he’s already done that and all we have is a foot here on earth but we ourselves are actually in Jesus at the right hand of God. And you see why we’re there, “That in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus,” and this is one of the coming ages.

In other words, God has put you and me at his right hand. We are already there. That’s not something you and I have to win. It’s not something we have to enter into. It’s something that God has already done and he says, “Believe that, have faith in that because in this position at my right hand you have power over all the things on the earth and you have power to bring into reality the things that I have created at my right hand.”

And loved ones, that’s true. God has purified everything at his right hand. He has brought all power there to his right hand where Jesus has destroyed the principalities and powers, and has destroyed sickness and sin, and disease, and there, at the right hand, all those things are destroyed. We are there at this very moment this night and that’s the certainty that the apostles had.

That’s the certainty that even these old men had in the Old Testament. They knew they were there at God’s right hand far above all rule, and authority, and dominion, and power and that’s why they were able to speak to the mountains and say, “Be removed and cast into the sea.” That’s why they were

able to speak to people who were diseased and say, "Be healed," because they lived in the reality of that, at the right hand of God. And loved ones, that's the real world. That is the real world and this world here that we live in is only a temporary place and we are not even under the power of this real world around us because this real world is only a passing façade.

Then the lies of Satan are that this world is the powerful world. The reality is that God has destroyed the power of this world and has put it under his feet. It has no power over us and as you live in the reality of that you find you have power over this world also. Loved ones, that's the place where we live and we need to spend time before the Father in prayer hearing that and hearing that repeatedly until that becomes the reality in which you and I live because that is a place of continual joy, that place at his right hand. And it is a place where there's full dominion and power.

You know, you can look at it there if you want to see more exactly what it is. It is in Ephesians 1:20-23, the chapter before, "Which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at this right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet." Jesus' feet, "And has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." That's why Peter and John could say to the lame man at the temple gate, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." [Acts 3:1-7] Peter did that because he knew he was in a position of power above the lameness and sickness of that man.

Loved ones, it's the same with us, you know. Many of us still have burdens for brothers and sisters that we feel are seeing things a little crookedly, or a little differently from the way they should.

We have power to help them. We have power to speak to those spirits of deception and to rebuke them in the name of Jesus and to cast them out in his name so that loved ones can see him clearly. And that's our position, because you remember what it says in Ephesians, maybe towards the end of the book, Ephesians 6:12, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood." You're not contending against loved ones who oppose you, or differ from you, or disagree with you. You're not "contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." And it's those that have been put under the feet of Jesus because you see back there in Ephesians 1:21 where Jesus is, "Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet."

All those powers and dominions, all those principalities and powers, all the rulers of darkness here on earth he has put under his feet and we, therefore, have them under our feet and have power to speak to them in Jesus' name. All we have to do is continue to do that. You don't have to exert great strength over them -- you don't have to fight them. You don't have to battle with them -- you don't have to argue with people or talk with people -- you simply have to stand in that position in your prayer times and glorify God that he has already done this work. Then when you go out among men act according to that. And that's what a book I have here has said continually to John Larson over the past few years in Mexico.

It was John that told me about this book by Kenyon In His Presence and he's an ordinary simple man really that has realized the truth of what we've just been sharing over the past few minutes. And the emphasis that the vital thing for us is to live in accordance with that reality, in accordance

with these promises that God has given us because that's what Isaac did. God spoke promises to him and Isaac lived in accordance with them. That's what we are to do. Kenyon has some of these promises. He says, "Truly, I say unto you whosoever shall say unto this mountain be thou taken up and cast into the sea and shall not doubt in his heart but shall believe what he sayeth cometh to pass he shall have it." He says, "There are two things to notice, he believes in his heart and he believes in his words." And that's true.

I think some of us feel, "Well yes, those things are great that you're saying, and we believe them and presumably as we believe them more and more then they will be manifested." No, believing isn't enough you have to believe in your heart and you have to believe in your words. You have to say the things. You have to speak and act as if these things are true and if you don't then of course, the work will not be done and that's why Kenyon says, "You believe in your heart and then you believe in the words on your lips." You believe in your heart and then you believe in the words on your lips. And then his next sentence is, "That gives you power over demons, and disease, and circumstances." And I think many of us face circumstances that we need changed and it's not enough to believe that God has changed them, or has defeated the elemental spirits that are behind them. But he asks us to speak to those circumstances, to actually speak to them in Jesus' name and say, "Be removed and cast into the sea." [Mark 11:23] Then we act in the light of that.

That's probably the third thing, you know, we have a feeling, "Well yeah, we should believe," but then sometimes you know, your heart gets kind of down and you kind of feel, "Well, maybe it's not going to happen." And Kenyon has several words I don't know that I can find them here, but he says, "If you only hope, you'll be dominated by worry and anxiety. But if you have faith and you believe that the thing has already been done in Jesus, then you can speak to the situation with complete confidence and you can rejoice in a thing that has already been done." And I think he says it a little bit further down and he takes the next promise that Jesus gave us, "All things whatsoever you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them and you shall have them." All things whatsoever you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them and you shall have them. "They have not been in your possession but it is just as real as though it were." Believe when you pray, believe that you receive a thing and you shall have it. He says in comment, "They have not been in your possession but it is just as real as though they were."

So, loved ones, we need to stop climbing up hill where we pray that God will do something about a situation but then we get our eyes back onto the situation. We allow our eyes to be filled with that situation, and we allow that information to get into our hearts, and to begin to undermine our faith. No, God expects us to pray and to believe that the thing is already done and then to praise him in the light of the promises in Ephesians 2, and in light of promises like this -- whatsoever you believe when you pray you shall have it. In the light of those promises to rejoice that the thing is already done and to go into the circumstances assuming that it is done.

So it's the same when you go into an office situation, or school situation, or faculty situation, and you pray that God will overcome a certain thing. God expects you to move into that situation in absolute confidence that that work has already been done. And that's the faith that enables God to work mightily in our lives, and it's only that faith that will do it. I think that's where maybe a wee bit too many of us are here because we're kind of used to praying and then hoping that God will make a change. And I don't know if you're like me, but you pray and then you go and you're looking. "I wonder has he made a change?" Well that's not faith, it's not faith.

Faith is being absolutely confident that God has done what you've asked him to do because he

promised, "If you ask anything in my name I will do it." Then going into that situation with absolute confidence that has happened. And if you say to me, "Well what do you do, do you kind of whomp yourself up and say, 'Oh I believe, I believe, I believe.?' " No, this dear word, "So faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." [Romans 10:17] You spend time in his word and you spend time in his presence in prayer. There you are built up in your most holy faith until you are absolutely confident that God has done these things.

Now that, loved ones, is what old Isaac did at that time if you look back just at Genesis 26, and we can go just a little bit further. Genesis 26, God whispered to him the promises in Verse 3, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you." And somehow when you get that from God himself, there's no substitute. "For to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves." And really, you need to get a promise from God that you can hang your hat on.

You need a promise from God that you can stand on, and then in Verse 5, "Because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." And of course, Abraham did all that by believing God. You remember, it gets back to that verse that I think we read years ago in Romans. It's Romans 4:19 and it's really a verse for all of us in the situations in which we're exercising faith. Romans 4:19, maybe it will be good to look at the promise you remember in Verse 17, that God had originally made to Abraham. Romans 4:17-19, "As it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' – in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, 'So shall your descendants be.' He did not weaken in faith."

And it was in this way that he kept and obeyed the ordinance of God, "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.'" [Romans 4:19-22] And that is faith.

That's working faith, where Abraham didn't weaken in faith, when he actually was able to consider his own body which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old. So he looked at his own body and 100 years old and all wrinkled and worn, and here was God promising him a son and he didn't weaken in faith even when he looked at that, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb who was ninety years of age, a little bit past the child bearing time and looked at her and saw, "Oh, she is past the time of bearing children." But no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. And that's the situation with us.

If you look at a campus here of 50,000 students and God has called us to get 10,000 abroad for himself. And he wants to be able to look at that 50,000 campus and not weaken in faith at all as we consider it so that no distrust will make us waver concerning the promise of God, but we will grow strong in our faith as we give glory to God. And the only way to grow strong in your faith as to give him glory and to spend time in his presence and to communion with him so that you're sure beyond all doubt that God has already done these things. And then you walk into the situation in

that faith and God observes your faith and he honors your faith, and he does the work. And that's the kind of thing that God did for Abraham.

Now maybe we could just go very, very briefly into the next few verses so that we'd get a little distance into the chapter. Let's look at the things that stop you doing that and the things that tried to stop Isaac doing it in Verse 6, "So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister'"; for he feared to say, 'my wife.' If you're going to exercise that faith you have to be absolutely honest and simple in what God has said he will do. And I think that's where we back off. We take a stand in God about something and then somebody says something to us that actually contradicts that and we in a subtle way think to ourselves, "Well, I'm going to look dumb if I say the opposite because they don't know all that I've talked about with God." So we kind of go along with it. And the moment the word of unbelief, or the word of sight escapes from our mouths, our faith begins to be undermined.

And what we need in God is absolutely simple honesty about what he has said, and absolute simple honesty with other people. And old Isaac went to this old lie, "She's my sister. She's my sister."

And we have to be just absolutely honest. If you say, "Oh well, now wait a minute, to the point where you kind of make a fool of yourself?" Well, God is usually kind to us and doesn't demand that we do that and sometimes you can't throw pearls before swine and you can't explain to someone all the things that God has explained to you but God does expect us to speak according to what he has shown us. And I think often we miss the boat because we don't have that shout. That was the shout that brought down the walls of Jericho.

You remember, they were to walk around the walls seven times and then they were to shout. And it didn't matter if they'd walk around the walls seven times, if they hadn't shouted the walls wouldn't have come down and God does demand that we shout. He demands that we go on record, that he has already done this thing. Loved ones, I think in our offices, and in our jobs, and at work, and in home, and in our church. If we would speak the word, and really it is true, that's what that Rhema fellowship is, "Speak the Word church" they call themselves. Because they emphasize that you need to speak what you believe and speak what you have faith that God has done. And unless you do that, God is not able to work the miracle. And of course, here Isaac did the very opposite. And I think often we do it, we kind of sidestep the thing a little. We just sidestep it and we lose everything. Everything drains away from us.

Don't sidestep it, hold to it, say what God has told you to say, "She is my sister," and then of course, the next sentence is so plain, "For he feared to say, 'My wife.'" For he feared to say my wife. Loved ones, fear of anything but our God is an insult to our God, isn't that right? I mean, fear of anything but our God is a blasphemy against our God. We have no right with our God to fear anything else. We haven't. We have no right to fear anything else. It's an insult to the God of the whole universe who has made everything that is. It's an insult to fear men, to fear circumstances, to fear anything but our God. And you know it takes you back to that great Psalms, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.' For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor from the pestilence that stalks at darkness." He will defend you from all those things. [Psalm 91:1-6] And it is a blasphemy against our God and against his statements in that Psalms 91 to fear anything but God.

Loved ones, don't, don't fear anything but our Lord God. And you see the moment fear comes in, that moment faith is gone. And the moment faith is gone, that moment God can no longer act. Unless we exercise faith and hold to it right through we will not see action. See, I think that's why some of us have been disappointed. I think we have. I think we've read about the George Muellers, and we've read about the great men of the Bible, and we've read about what we do in certain situations in our church, or certain situations in the community when things need to be changed, and we've read about those things and we think, "Yes, we should believe. We should believe." And we try to believe but we never actually take a stand of faith on what God has said, that he has raised us up and made us sit at his right hand far above all rule and authority and dominion and power. And if we would do that and hold to it and live rejoicing in the reality of that, God would change the circumstances. [Audio ends]