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**SERIES: Fear or Faith? (Genesis Vol. 3)- Wk 1**

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**Message Title: A Fragile Faith pt. 2**

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**Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us." And Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar, and settled there.**

(NASB, Gen 26:12-17)

Now I think that paragraph is meant to surprise us. Isaac is struggling with one crisis of faith after another. He's got a very fragile faith. And after being rebuked by a Philistine king, what we don't expect is for the writer to say, "And God just poured out blessing...after blessing... after blessing upon him." But notice the text doesn't say, "Because Isaac was a great man of faith, because Isaac was doing so well, making such good choices, walking in obedience."

There's only one explanation for this: Because *God promised*. God promised Abraham. Isaac was simply an heir to the promise. So he is struggling with decisions of faith, and God is just pouring out blessings, to the extent that the Philistines chase him away: "You're just too powerful." So the story goes on:

**Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the same names which his father had given them. But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of flowing water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek [*which means "quarreling"*], because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah [*which means "opposition"*]. He moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth [*which means "roominess"*], for he said, "At last the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land." (vs. 18-22)**

Notice what he says there: "At last *the LORD* has made room for us."

**Then he went up from there to Beersheba. 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 the sake of**

**My servant Abraham.” So he built an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well.**

(vs. 23-25)

God, in His sovereignty, is determined to get Isaac back where he belongs. So he keeps digging wells, and God keeps using the Philistines to push him on—kind of shepherding, herding him along. Now Isaac may have wondered why. He may have struggled with all of this. But God wasn’t trying to move him back into the land to punish him. He wasn’t doing this to make him pay. He was doing it so that He could bless him. So He uses the Philistines and these circumstances and keeps pushing Isaac along until he finally ends up back where God wants him. And Isaac knows that. He says, “The LORD has done this.”

When he finally lands where God wants him, God shows up again on the scene and says, “I’m going to bless you. I’m going to multiply your descendants. I’m going to give you this land. I’m going to take care of you like you can’t even imagine.” And why is He going to do it? Because Isaac performed so well; he had such a great faith; he was such a hero of faith? No, that’s not what He says. He says, “Because you are Abraham’s son.” That’s it: “You’re an heir to the promise. I promised Abraham, so I’m going to do this for you.” Just pure grace.

Isaac believes it. For the first time we’re told he set up an altar and he worshiped. He nailed in the tent pegs: *We’re going to stay here.* They dug a well. They were finally back where they belonged.

**Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath and Phicol the commander of his army. Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?” They said, “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.’” Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace. Now it came about on the same day, that Isaac’s servants came in and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, “We have found water.” So he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. (vs. 26-33)**

One more event taken out of the life of Isaac just to tell us that the blessing of God was so profound on Isaac that the pagans around him could not miss it. It was so profound that the pagans came along and said, “You are so blessed by your God that you scare us. And we want to make an oath. We want to make a deal: Let’s just all get along here.” So they did.

It really raises the question: How blessed would they have had to have been for all these pagans to see it and know that God is *pouring* out blessing upon them—to the extent that the pagans enter into this covenant in their own land?

We really have to wrestle with the question: What is the point of this chapter? Is it that we come out of this chapter thinking, *Wow, Isaac was a great man of faith—this incredible patriarch who trusted God and walked in obedience to Him. He’s a Hall of Famer!* I don’t

know about you, but I don't come out of this chapter with that. I come out of this chapter saying, "Wow! The writer gave us several glimpses of Isaac, and in every one he's got this fragile faith. He's not doing very well. He's struggling. It's no wonder they wouldn't let him leave the land."

But in the midst of all of that, you have God appearing and reappearing and saying, "Isaac, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to bless you like you can't even imagine! I'm just going to pour it on you." God blessed him to the extent that even these pagans saw it and responded to it. And in every case, it was not because of Isaac's performance; it was because of God's promise. Isaac was just the heir to the promise.

Well, if that's the case, then maybe the point of the chapter is *not* the greatness of Isaac's faith. Maybe it is the greatness of the *faithfulness of God*. Here we have a look at a patriarch that just doesn't do very well. But God kept His promise, because it was never on the basis of Abraham or Isaac's performance, but on the basis of grace.

For hundreds of years the Hebrew people believed God's promise that one day God would shed His own blood because of their inability to keep the covenant. So they would offer animal sacrifices, knowing that this was only symbolic of a day when God would shed His blood once and for all, to cover the sins of the people. In God's perfect providence that time came when God Himself became flesh, walked on this Earth, and was nailed to a cross to shed His blood—because of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and your and my inability to keep the covenant.

So *He* paid that price. And to those of us who believe that, who embrace it, who make it our own, we are credited with righteousness. In other words, our sins are forgiven and we are made righteous before God. We are radically transformed. It's the very life of Christ that now comes in and takes over. We have a new heart that we might walk in obedience and keep His laws and His commandments and His statutes.

The New Testament also says that **when we are "in Christ"**—that is, when we have trusted Christ as our Savior—we become a son of Abraham. **We now become heirs to the promise**—not because we performed so well, not because we're great people of faith, not because we had a great week—but **simply because God promised, and we believed.**

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One of the big struggles we have in becoming a people of faith is we get it in our heads that it's up to us. We think, *I've got to do better. I've got to become a person of faith. I've got to try harder.* Maybe this week you come in and say, "Man, this week was a disaster. I've failed all over the place. I went to Gerar; I lied. I was fleeing to Egypt. The Philistines were plugging up my wells and moving me all over the land."

Sometimes what we don't understand is that in the middle of that, God is showing up and saying, "I'm just going to bless you. I'm going to bless you like you can't even imagine!" And we think, *I'm so unworthy that couldn't possibly happen.* But God is saying, "That was never the point. It has never been about you and your worthiness. It has never been about your ability to perform. You are just heir to the promise. I made a promise, and regardless of your performance, I'm going to keep it." That has always been the basis of the promise.

Philippians Chapter 1, Verse 6 says, **“He who has begun a good work...will be faithful to complete it.”** Genesis 26 is just a fleshing out of that promise. God started it, and God is going to finish it, regardless of the fragile faith of Isaac. It was never based on Isaac’s performance.

When we think that *we* have to do it—that we have to somehow make ourselves into a great hero of the faith; we have to put ourselves in the Faith Hall of Fame—we get discouraged because we spend all day looking in the mirror, looking at ourselves. I’ll guarantee you that if you want to be a discouraged Christian, fix your eyes on yourself. Let’s face it; we all do a pretty lousy job in this walk of faith. We struggle! When we fix our eyes on ourselves, we just get discouraged. We’re lousy. And we can hear the words of Paul in Galatians 3:3, **“You foolish [Bereans]! What started by the power of the Spirit of God, now you think you can complete in your flesh?”**

It started as a work of God; it will be completed as a work of God. **It is His power in us that makes us into a people of faith.** Why? Because He promised. **Ephesians Chapter 1 has that magnificent discussion about the purpose of our Salvation. Ultimately it is “to the praise of the glory of His grace.”** Paul goes on with that discussion in Chapter 2: **“For by grace you are saved by faith... not of works, lest any man should boast. For you are His workmanship [His trophy, His creation held up in the heavenlies], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which were prepared by God beforehand, that we might walk in them.”**

Do you know what God has in mind for you? God is going to make you into what He wants you to be by His grace. And then one day He’s going to hold you up in the heavenlies as a trophy of His grace. You will be so magnificent the angels will gasp at what you’ve become. And they will say, “Look at what God did!” Not, “Look at what Bryan did.” But, “Look at what *God* did.” And God will say, “Yes, I promised. This guy had a fragile faith. I had to keep chasing him around, getting him back into the land. Oftentimes he didn’t trust Me. But I made a promise. I said, ‘I started this work, and I will complete this work.’”

That promise is to every person who has trusted Jesus as Savior. Nobody is going to come up short of the finish line. Isaac ended up in the Faith Hall of Fame not because of the greatness of his faith, but because of the faithfulness of God. God put him there. *God* did what was necessary to get him there.

After the great discussion about the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11, the writer comes out in Chapter 12 and says, **“Because this is true, then fix your eyes on Christ Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.”** He started; He’s going to finish it. In other words, to be a great person of faith, stop looking in the mirror. Stop constantly looking at your own performance and your own failures and your own struggles. You’re not the one that’s going to do it. **Fix your eyes on Christ Jesus.** He will do in you what you cannot do for yourselves. So our eyes are fixed on Him, not on ourselves.

**It’s not about the greatness of our faith. It never will be. It’s about the great faithfulness of God. You are simply an heir to the promise. And on that basis He will continue to pour out His blessing. Just pure grace!**

I don’t know how you did this week. You may have come out of this week thinking you’re doing all right. Most of us come out of the week thinking, *It was another lousy week. I wish I could be a greater person of faith.* We’re expecting God to show up and give us a scolding. But instead God shows up and says, “I’m going to bless you. I’m going to bless you like you can’t

even imagine, because you're an heir to the promise. I promise!" I don't know about you, but that puts joy in my heart and a smile on my face. **It's just pure grace!**

*Our Father, we are thankful for amazing grace. Lord, You don't pour out blessing upon us because we're great performers. You pour Your blessing upon us because we simply believed by faith that You would keep Your promise. And on the basis of faith, we have become heirs to the promise; we have become sons of Abraham in Christ. Lord, truly we can sing, "Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me." God, we're thankful that that's true. Help us to understand it, to believe it, and to live like it.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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Nat: Bryan, that is such an interesting chapter in Genesis. I think it really shows Isaac's struggles and God's faithfulness, doesn't it?

Bryan: Yeah. I think that is the pattern. The life of Isaac is pretty much captured in one chapter. And you see clearly, there's God's part and there's Isaac's part and God's going to keep His promise. God made a promise to Abraham. So He's going to keep His promise to Isaac. And Isaac doesn't come out as some superstar. But what you see is God is faithful and He's going to keep His promise.

Nat: I think it'd be fair to say after looking at the text that Isaac wasn't wanting to struggle. He wasn't trying to rebel. He simply battled fear. And fear does not mix well with faith, does it?

Bryan: Right. So he's not an Absalom. He's not wanting to rebel. He's not wanting to be bad. Nobody wants to be fearful. But fear and faith don't mix. And so when you're fearful, you make unfortunate decisions and there's consequences to that. But I think again, God rewards his heart and He's faithful and steps in again and again. I think for our listeners, it's just helpful to remember when fear is greater than our faith, we're going to make bad decisions. So it's not inconsequential.

Nat: We want to believe that our unwillingness to accept the blessings of God is because of our humility. But that's not correct either, is it?

Bryan: No. And I think people often want to pass off that lack of faith as humility. You know, you read through the New Testament, read through Ephesians Chapter One for example, and God has lavished His riches on us. Well, we don't necessarily live that way and it's kind of the hang your head, kick a stone, I'm not worthy. If all I get is a Ticket to Heaven, that's more than I deserve. And we pass that off as humility. But it's not humility. It's disbelief. It's an unwillingness to accept God's grace and what God says is true and what God has given us. So God said, we're children of the King, and we in turn choose to live like paupers. You know, that's not humility. That's disbelief.

So if I really just understand and believe God tells the truth, then I live like it. And that includes the riches of His blessings that flow out of His grace.

Nat: Something you said there made me think. You said some people treat their faith or Jesus as a one way Ticket to Heaven. How should they view Jesus? What should it do to their faith?

Bryan: I think to understand the terminology of the New Testament is radical, and those of us that have grown up in the church maybe lose sight of that: terms like *born again*, a *new creation*, *metamorphosed* - you know, I was a caterpillar and I'm a beautiful butterfly. It's radical. And so to realize it's a relationship. It's a relationship that starts at the moment of belief or conversion, and will last for eternity, with the best yet to come. That's far more than a Ticket to Heaven. It should be conversion. It should be transformative. It should be a change from the inside out.

Nat: It seems like being reborn, being born again, impacts how we live day to day, and it helps transform our fear into faith.

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely.

Nat: Fantastic. Good point. Thank you, Bryan.