

## **Rehoboth**

Genesis 26:12-25

As a boy, I shared a rather large bedroom with three older brothers, and for the most part, we all got along pretty well. There were certainly times of conflict, but we all understood the necessity of respecting each other's property and space even in such cramped quarters. We had well defined boundaries, so we didn't have a lot of arguments.

The room had three desks and three closets, and so, when I was young, I was left out. But the day when my oldest brother left for college, I took over his desk and closet, and some of this dresser drawer space. I claimed them as my own and moved right in. When he returned for holidays and for the summer vacation, arguments could easily have started. There could well have been the sorts of petty arguments that we find in our text this morning. But looking back on it, my brother responded to my "takeover" graciously, much like Isaac did. It was I who acted like the wicked Philistines, claiming things for myself that rightly belonged to someone else.

There is much to be learned in this passage today, for this passage is much more than an example of the all too common petty bickering that takes place between people. In one sense, the occasion for this bickering was trivial. It was just a fight about the ownership of some wells used for water supply. But in this rather juvenile conflict, we learn some valuable and timeless spiritual lessons.

The first is simply an understanding of the nature of man. Sinful man. This shouldn't surprise you, and therefore it shouldn't be particularly troublesome to recognize.

## **I. WICKED MEN WILL DEMONSTRATE SELFISH ENVY.**

Sometimes we let that surprise us! And it really gets discouraging. We face opposition and conflict, and we are unprepared for it, because we foolishly think that others won't demonstrate their wickedness. But, of course, they do.

The context here starts in,  
v.12-14

They envied him. They were jealous of his prosperity. They resented the fact that he was successful and that they were not. Such envious resentment produces horrible fruit.

v.15

What a horrible thing to do! It's so childish, and yet such a good example of what people are still doing to each other today. Isaac had become a successful farmer, reaping an abundance of crops and maintaining his huge array of flocks and herds. Obviously, he needed a large water supply for both those operations, and he utilized the wells which his father Abraham had dug. Wells, I should note, that were rightfully his since they had been dug by Abraham, and then-King Abimelech had given Abraham the right to live anywhere in the land he wished.

Nonetheless, in their selfish envy, they turned to this cruel act. They filled in the wells with dirt. Something I might expect from a rambunctious two year old who didn't want another two year old play with their toy. In this case, it was oppression of the worst order. We might call it terrorism today. Or, at the very least, vandalism. And the connection is clear and direct.

### **A. Selfish envy leads to cruel oppression.**

I say that as a general principle, based upon this one

example. It's a warning that we all need to heed, for selfish envy can creep into our hearts and into our lives almost undetected at times. And cause terrible harm to our souls.

Selfish envy means that you are so thoroughly focused upon yourself and your own needs that you begrudge others who don't share in your difficulties. You wish for yourself that which belongs to another, and there is, within you, a degree of anger at the whole situation. Resentment. Even bitterness.

I've known many angry people over the years. You can usually see it on their faces. There are many resentful people. Many bitter people. It's a horrible existence, and a very destructive one. In the worst cases, that destruction is inflicted upon others in the form of cruelty.

You may well have been the victim of the cruel oppression which comes from such selfish envy. Maybe you have even inflicted it upon others, at times. None of us should dare to point fingers at anyone else unless you first remove the beam from your own eyes. Thus we are given a very straightforward warning in the form of an exhortation in,

Hebr. 12:14 "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

So look into your own heart? Is there a bitter root? Any root of bitterness? Resentment. Anger resulting from envy or selfishness? Those are hard questions to ask, but necessary. As you stand before the Lord, do whatever is necessary to put to death the root of bitterness. Put to death the jealousy of envy, before it destroys you. We'll see more of how to do that as we go through this text. But first notice what else selfish envy produces.

## **B. Selfish envy leads to proud insecurity.**

v.16

I realize that I'm using 21st century psychological language, and I want you to fully understand what I mean. Especially the word insecurity. Insecurity is rampant today, psychological insecurity. That refers to a personal lack of self-confidence, someone unsure of themselves, and unstable.

In general, people today are incredibly insecure. And that insecurity really boils down to fear, specifically the fear of man. A lack of self-confidence in the face of another person. And it often creates the sort of conflict that we find here, prompted ultimately by pride.

In my observation, insecurity and pride are often tied together directly. It is often the proud person who is the most afraid of others, most intimidated by others. And pride can mask, or cover, insecurity. Pride can give the appearance of self-confidence and security, but such outward security is often merely the pride of a very fragile ego covering a deep-seated insecurity.

Now, I don't want to go too deeply into the psychologizing of this event, but I do think it's valuable to understand the nature of these Philistines. They were wicked men, whose hearts were filled with selfishness and, therefore, envy. They couldn't tolerate the success of Isaac and his family, so in their insecurity, they drove him away by cruel oppression.

And how did Isaac respond? He left.

v.17

Isaac gives us a positive example of godliness.

## **II. GODLY MEN WILL DEMONSTRATE SELF-RESTRAINED GRACIOUSNESS.**

Self-restrained graciousness. He could have stayed and fought. He had a legitimate right to those wells, and his legal rights might have prevailed. He may well have sought to defeat the Philistines in armed battle, and he had ample manpower to win.

But he didn't. He left. Why? Because he was a coward? No, I don't believe so. Rather, he left because of his own self-restraint. It takes great courage to exercise self-restraint. It takes great courage to be gracious with people who are being cruel to you!

It takes great courage to obey Jesus' admonition, "If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also." Let me read that whole instruction,

Luke 6:27 "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. 32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father

also is merciful."

Isaac was a godly man who understood the wisdom which would later be written down in,

Prov. 15:1 "A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."

### **A. A soft answer turns away wrath.**

Isaac gave such a soft answer. A gentle answer. A self-restrained answer. A gracious answer.

He left, and went back to the places where his father Abraham had lived, and where he had dug wells.

v.17-18

And what was the response from the Philistines?

v.20

They followed him. They quarreled with him again, even after he moved away. They claimed those wells also, even though they were the very wells dug and owned by Abraham. Such childish insecurity. "That's mine. Gimme that." "The water is ours!"

What did Isaac do? He named the well Esek, a word which means contention or strife, leaving in that name a memorial of the pettiness of the conflict.

But then he left! He refused to get involved in the argument. It was too petty, too unimportant. It was useless. What a great lesson for us, one repeated by specific NT exhortations.

2Tim. 2:23 "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility

correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”

“A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient.” Simple instruction, isn’t it? But difficult to put into practice. Thus it is an exhortation every one of us needs to hear, for the temptation to quarrel will come quite often.

Isaac refused to quarrel. With the great courage of self-restrained graciousness, he moved on again. Farther away. And they still followed him. And they still claimed the well for themselves.

v.21

Again, Isaac gives the well a meaningful name. Sitnah. That word means accusation or enmity. Or hostility. Clearly an appropriate name for this well.

That name has some personal implications as well, for the name Sitnah is composed of three Hebrew consonants, S, T, and N. Those same consonants are also the personal name of the one who is called the accuser, Satan. Hebrew words often had such intentional references. Isaac is actually giving this well the name of Satan.

Yet, Isaac continues his graciousness. Finally, he moves far enough away, and they leave him alone. His graciousness has won him peace.

v.23

Rehoboth means wide places. It refers to a broad expanse of land, and open and roomy place noted for its spaciousness.

What a blessing that was for Isaac, to finally have room to live in peace, wide, open spaces in which he could dwell peacefully. And he gives the praise to God.

v.22b

It was, in fact, the Lord’s promise to give his people a broad expanse of land, lots of land. They wouldn’t be limited to a small place, with limited resources. Theirs would be abundant place, a land flowing with milk and honey. In fact, the Lord promised to extend their borders. They would inherit a vast, unmeasurable land. That was the promise of the covenant.

Go back to Isaac for a moment, and let me use one specific word to describe his character which we have just seen in action. The one word to describe what he just did by showing such self-restrained graciousness is the word “Meek.”

What does the word meek mean? Basically this, the willingness not to demand your own rights. The willingness to voluntarily give up what you might well deserve. It is, in many ways, the opposite of being self-assertive. Such meekness takes great courage. It is not related to fearfulness or weakness, for those who are fearful or weak often fight the hardest to defend their rights. Have you ever noticed that?

The one who is meek is the one willing to let God be the judge, and willing to submit to his will and his purposes, trusting in his providence. Indeed,

### **B. A meek spirit brings about God’s purposes.**

So we have demonstrated by Isaac.

You might think that a meek spirit would bring about defeat. After all, if you don’t stand up for your rights, then you’ll get

walked all over. If you don't stand up for yourself, you'll lose everything. Well, Isaac didn't.

And neither will we. In fact, in Jesus' own words, by his own promise, the meek will inherit the earth! So far from losing everything, those who are strong enough not to demand their own rights will actually gain everything in the end.

Matt. 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Or we read in,

Ps. 37:4 "Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. 6 He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. 7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. 8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth. 10 For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more. 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

Too often we imitate the values of this world, when we act as though the strong and powerful will inherit the land? Too often we respond to situations by demanding our rights? And too often we find ourselves in conflict because of that.

Young children often argue among themselves. They get mad and say to their brother or sister, "That's mine." "Give it back." Meekness is the opposite of that. And a meek spirit brings about God's purposes. The meek will inherit the earth.

The point is, you don't have to fight for your own rights. God will. God fights for you. Woe to those who try to fight for themselves. Isaac is such a perfect example. He would inherit the land, and not because he was willing to fight for it, but because he believed God would give it too him.

God had promised, and he renews that promise in response to Isaac's meekness and godliness demonstrated here.

v.23-24

Indeed,

### **III. GODLY MEN WILL INHERIT GOD'S COVENANT BLESSINGS.**

Isaac would. By God's promise.

v.24b "I will bless you..."

The descendants and the land. That was the blessing. And of course, that blessing carries over into the NT. And it's not limited to the natural descendants of Abraham nor to the physical land of Israel. Instead, we are called the children of Abraham, we who believe in Jesus Christ.

And the promised land? Ultimately, it is the whole earth. "The meek will inherit the earth."

With that promised covenant blessing, what does God tell Isaac? He tells him something that is timeless, something that applies to us in the New covenant just as it did then in the Old covenant. He tells Isaac exactly what he needed to hear when he was confronted and oppressed by wicked men in that day. And it is something that we need to hear, when we are confronted and oppressed by wicked men in our day, when the insecurities of our fears are stimulated.

What was the great encouragement God gave to Isaac? What is the great encouragement he gives to us? Do not fear.

Now, if I gave you that encouragement on the basis of my own power, it would be useless, even despairing. If you are in great danger and come to me for help, and I say to you, “Don’t be afraid,” well, that doesn’t help you very much. Because I don’t have the power to deal with the source of your fear, your enemies. God does. So when God says, “Do not fear,” it is of great encouragement because it means that he will take care of the problem.

Specifically, he says to Isaac, “I am with you.”  
v.24

Make no mistake about it,

**A. The presence of the living God removes our fear.**  
God had given Abraham the same encouragement.

Gen. 15:1 “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

And so we read,

Ps. 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. 3 Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war may rise against me, In this I will be confident.”

And also,

Ps. 1185 “I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD

answered me and set me in a broad place. 6 The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? 7 The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me.”

And finally,

Hebr. 13:5 “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”  
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God takes away our fear. The presence of God removes our fear. And we should respond in worship! For,

**B. The promises of the living God provoke us to worship.**  
Isaac’s example is so appropriate.  
v.25

He believed God. He trusted in God. His fear was gone. And he worshipped!

These things are so practical, so relevant for our daily lives. Lots of things cause us fear. Perhaps physical danger or harm. Or financial trouble. It could be the unknown of sickness or illness. It could be death itself. It might be other people--the oppression of enemies or the discouragement of being let down by people you love.

It’s amazing what sorts of things we can make ourselves afraid of. The ultimate answer to those fears is the promise of God’s covenant, the promise of God’s presence. And the ultimate antidote to fear is worship!

This morning, God’s covenant promise is demonstrated for

you in the sacrament that lies before us. His covenant promise to forgive us of our sins is pictured in the cups which are his blood which was poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.

His covenant promise to free us from his own condemning wrath is pictured in the bread, which is his body which was given for you. In Jesus' own body, hung upon the cross, every bit of God's condemning wrath was poured out, and his justice was perfectly satisfied, so that Scripture can declare that,

Rom. 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

And the promise of God's presence is so perfectly revealed. For at the last supper, Jesus said, "This is my body." And, "This is my blood."

So, by his spirit, we eat his flesh and drink his blood. Not physically, of course, but spiritually. Our communion is with him, as well as with one another. He is serving us this meal, for this is the Lord's Supper. All of that is to say that in this sacrament, more than at any other time, the presence of God with us should be known and experienced.

God is with us. Therefore, we have nothing to fear. Therefore, with Isaac, let us call upon the name of the Lord, and offer to him our acceptable sacrifices of praise and worship.