

Part 27: Well, Well, Well

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Jerry West and the Los Angeles Lakers were great. But they had one weakness: The Boston Celtics. In 1962, the Lakers had the best record in the West, but lost to the Celtics in the championship. The following year, 1963, the Lakers had the best record in the west and lost to the Celtics in the championship. Five times they would go on to meet the Celtics, five times they would lose.

At this point, everyone knew what to expect from the Lakers—disappointment. But in the offseason of 1968, they made changes. The Lakers added future Hall of Famer Wilt Chamberlain to tip the scales in their favor. That offseason was a huge season of anxiety, expectations, and anticipation. Going into the Finals, the Lakers were 11-5 favorites. Everything had aligned, the roster was set, they couldn't mess this up.

If you've ever been presented with a "can't miss opportunity" in life—you know the excitement and anxiety that often comes with it. There's pressure, there's fear, there's panicked second guessing. It's the shot that everyone says we can't miss, that we end up missing. It's the putt we've made 10,000 times that we miss at the biggest moment. The favored Jerry West, Elgin Baylor, and Wilt Chamberlain Lakers would in fact lose a sixth time to the Celtics despite their favored odds. Despite this seeming failure, Jerry West would go on to become the iconic shadow on the NBA logo.

For the last few weeks, our study in the book of Genesis has been following a pivotal offseason in the biblical narrative. Abraham was the franchise star of God's promise. But he's retired, and is buried alongside his wife. Abraham made some mistakes, but he finished well. God was faithful and Isaac is set up with a promise that should be a layup. God's promise worked, God was faithful.

Will Isaac rise to the moment? Will Isaac learn from his father and advance the legacy of faith? Or will Isaac blow it? The promise is there. But will he trust it? Will you trust it? And what happens when we don't?

Isaac understands what's expected of him. He's the inheritor of God's promise to the nations. He's the Archie Manning of his own generation. But in an attempt to secure his own legacy, he nearly loses it. But it's in the lies regarding his wife and the debates surrounding his wells which show us our own hope in God's promise. When he seemed strongest, he fell apart. When he seemed most ruined, God raised him up. God delivered Isaac by his promise and God changed Isaac by his promise. That's why the title of our sermon this morning is, "Well, Well, Well."

Our memory verse at church this week has been this: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." God's promise is our sure guide to life's can't miss opportunities, and it's hope for those who have.

Our main point this morning is this: **Sin holds you back, but grace draws you forward.** And we will see this inversion in three ways this morning: **Sin makes us stupid, Faith makes us content, and Grace makes us humble.**

Our passage begins this way: **Genesis 26:1-6**, “Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went 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. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

Talk about living up to expectations! Kids, have you ever felt the weight of your parents on you? Well, Isaac not only had the expectations of his dad, he also had the expectations of God himself. God’s desire to bless the world was now moving from Abraham to Isaac.

Reading the Bible isn’t like watching two sports teams play that you have no interest in. This isn’t a neat little story about Abraham and Isaac. Isaac is representative of every person who would hope in God’s promise. His success is our success, his failure would be our failure.

God had already proven to Isaac that his promise wouldn’t fail. God caused barren Sarah to conceive. God caused Abraham to grow despite being a wanderer. God caused Isaac’s own wife to conceive despite her own barrenness. God was faithful. God never missed. This was a can’t miss opportunity. Abraham set him up, God called him off the bench. He just has to close the deal.

In the original Hebrew, this passage reads like this: “Don’t blow it.”

But here’s our first point this morning: **Sin makes us stupid.**

Biblically speaking, when I say sin makes us stupid, I’m not saying you’re stupid. You might be the brightest mind in the room. But, sin makes bright people think stupid things about God and about their own life circumstances. In Proverbs 30 the writer laments his own sin: “Surely, I am too stupid to be a man.” He says, “I haven’t learned wisdom, I don’t know the Holy One, I’m lacking all understanding.” And we see this play out in this very passage.

The author of Genesis wants us to see with clarity that Isaac is the new Abraham. Abraham walked through three primary trials, all of which he failed and was saved only by God’s faithfulness.

Isaac is walking in his father’s footsteps. The first real challenge that Abraham encountered in the Promised Land was a famine. Fearing God wouldn’t care for him in the land, he left and went to Egypt, and things went terribly. The second challenge was Sarah’s own barrenness. Abraham didn’t believe God would ever keep his word to give him a child through Sarah, so they conspired to have a child with Hagar. That decision went terribly. And finally, the third recurring issue Abraham faced was regarding his cowardice. He had a beautiful wife, and anytime he encountered a powerful king he would lie about his wife, claiming she was his sister in hopes that the kings wouldn’t kill Abraham in order to take his wife. This also went terribly, twice actually. Every action he took thinking he was preserving God’s promise to him ended up putting God’s very promise in danger.

Last week barrenness led Isaac and Rebekah to prayerfulness and the Lord provided. Here, right out of the gate a famine comes to the Land and God, who knows our weaknesses and wants to help us, reveals

himself to Isaac: "Don't go to Egypt, Isaac. Follow me, wander with me, and you'll dwell safely." And guess what, Isaac listened. Isaac trusted the Lord.

Verse six tells us he settled in Gerar, north of Egypt, safe in God's promise. But, there's a final curveball, one Abraham couldn't hit, and one that's coming straight to Isaac: **Genesis 26:6-7**, "So Isaac settled 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," thinking, "lest the men of the place kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance." Same region, same problem, same people, same excuses, same sin.

Sin makes us stupid. Here's how sin works. Sin makes us stupid because on one hand we are skeptical that God can provide what he has promised. But on the other hand we are almost certain that sin is always able to provide what it promises. But, God never fails and sin never helps. Take heed, lest you fall.

Let's let Isaac's case study teach us three things about our own hearts here:

First, *sin makes us stupid by feeding on our fear*. Despite God's promise to provide, Isaac feared for his life. But by the end of this passage, the Lord says to Isaac, "Fear not, I am with you." Sin makes us fear the presence of other things more than we fear the absence of God. Psalm 23:4 says, "I will fear no evil because you are with me." David's greatest fear was not being with God. With God he could face the darkness. But sin flips our fear: it makes us more fearful of losing sin's potential good than of losing God's eternal promise.

Second, *sin makes us stupid because we think it works*. **Genesis 26:8**, "When he had been there a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah, his wife."

Isaac's ploy worked. No one killed him. But did his sin really work? No! How do we know? Because no one tried to take Rebekah. Isaac didn't live because his sinful plan worked. Isaac lived because God's promise worked. Never attribute to sin what comes from God and God alone. You might think that sin makes you safe, but sin is never safe.

Isaac's sin actually produced the opposite effect. It was his sin that put him in danger. Abimelech looked out the window and saw Isaac and Rebekah doing things that siblings shouldn't be doing to one another. The wheels on the bus go round and round. Water runs downhill. And sin will find you out. It will be exposed.

Which is our final point on sin: *Sin makes us stupid and harmful to everyone involved*. Look at Abimelech's response, **Genesis 26:9-11**, "So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.' " Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lied to your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

What was Isaac concerned about? He feared only himself. He didn't care about Rebekah, he didn't care about the accidental adultery he would have caused someone to have. He only wanted to prevent harm to himself and as a result he not only harmed himself, but he put everyone else's wellbeing (both

physically and spiritually) at risk. Sin is the greatest public health hazard. It helps no one, harms everyone, and left unchecked kills everything.

But God, and his promise, makes a way for sinners to be saved. Here, it's through Abimelech. Well, well, well. Did you see that. Isaac thought Abimelech was a threat to God's promised family—but in the end he's the one who protects God's promised family! "Whoever touches this man or his wife will be put to death." Sin would have set everyone back, but God brought them safely through.

Your sin has set you back, and yet the one who should have put you to death was put to death so that whoever believes in this man, will not be put to death, but will have everlasting life. Sin makes you stupid, grace brings us to safety.

This grace changes us. Here's our second point, **Faith makes us content.**

Remember earlier when the Lord appeared to Isaac himself and about all that blessing stuff and how Abraham was blessed because he obeyed his voice and kept his charge, commandments and statutes? Well, Isaac just failed at all of that. But look at what happened: **Genesis 26:12-13**, "And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy."

Does God desire us to obey? Yes! Do we do great harm when we disobey? Yes! Is God's blessing dependent upon our performance? No. God's blessing is based on our faith, and those who have faith, receive grace. Stupid grace. Grace we don't deserve, but that's the whole point. Grace is what we need most, God's promise is how we get that peace. We trust him, and nothing else.

The God who Isaac feared wouldn't provide, just provided him with a blessing beyond measure in the midst of famine. It's not Isaac's wisdom, or work ethic that bore this harvest. "The Lord blessed him," and he harvested a hundredfold.

You don't have to be a farmer to know that a hundred fold is a lot. But let me put that in perspective. A traditional yield for a farmer would be four to five fold. An excellent year, like ones boasted about by Cicero, was 10-15 fold. A "bumper crop" year is thirty fold. But here, the Lord blessed Isaac a hundred fold.

And here the Philistines envied him. Let that sink in for a moment. It was Isaac who sought refuge with the people of Gerar, it was Isaac who wanted the peace they had. But now the tables have turned. Those permanent and established people, they wanted whatever Isaac had. They envied him.

What did he have? Material wealth and good. But why and how did he have it? God blessed him. Now, they don't see it that way. But that's what it is. They envied what he had, and what he had he had by the blessing of God. We often look at the world wanting what they want—but we are the ones who have what the world wants. They just can't see it. But they are about to see it. They don't yet connect Isaac's blessing to the Lord. But they soon will.

Look at what these envious Philistines did. We read in **Genesis 26:15-16**, they stopped up all the wells that Abraham had dug when he was in that area. Why would they do that? Because Isaac the sojourner was becoming stronger than the established people in the land. That's why Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us."

Do you see what's happening? The Philistine's are thinking how we might: "This guys hogging all the blessing. We want the crops and the people and the power." So they set a plan to get rid of it by going at the source—they bottle up the wells. He's got to have something in those wells, so let's plug them up and get him out of here and then we can take them for ourselves. And they do just this, and the King attempts to send Isaac away.

And here's how grace changed Isaac: he left. Now, I'm not a farmer, but it seems hard to grow crops on the move, and it seems especially hard to grow crops without water. By all outward appearances Isaac was walking away from blessing and provision. But Isaac is helping the people of Gerar, and us today, understand where we find our ultimate provision, comfort and contentment.

Look at how this shows up in: **Genesis 26:17-25**. Isaac left. He found another good well, a well that belonged to his father. It was a good well, one with living, fresh spring water. God provided for him. But the Philistines said, "Nope, we need that one if we are going to be blessed." So they came and took it. Then Isaac goes to another well. God provided, the Philistines came and took it. Then he went to another well, and they didn't take it. So he named the final well "Rehoboth" which means, "broad place." And he said, "For now the Lord had made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

And then we read this: **Genesis 26:23-25**, "From there he went up to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." 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."

There it is, the source of Isaac's contentment. "The Lord has made room for us." Our world's marketplace on contentment is crowded. Everyone wants access on what limited resources are out there. But the Lord makes room for his people. How? In himself. God will make us fruitful in the land. God will give the Christian what they need to enjoy him, love others, and live faithfully in whatever land we are in. How? Because he gives us himself. He gives us his promise, and he doesn't need what the world does. Neither do you.

My wife and I were let in on a Facebook Marketplace secret. There's a wealthy community not too far from here, and they post their super nice stuff on there for really cheap. So it's a hot market. You've got to be quick on the draw. You've got to get there before others do. It creates a sort of panic. This is such a great product, it's such a great deal, I can't miss out on this.

But have you stopped to consider who is selling it? The person selling had the ability to buy it full price brand new. But now, at the end of it all, they didn't need it. They were willing to shell out the big bucks, more than you ever could. Yet here it is, used and discounted. Why? Because they used it and they were still discontent. There's a new one they are chasing. Maybe that one will satisfy them. Maybe when they sell that one, it will satisfy you. But the blessing we need, the contentment we need is based in the promise of God and God alone.

Psalms 84:11-12, "For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you."

The world can take so many things from us. But it cannot take away the blessing of God. What the richest man in the world really wants is the joy that the poorest Christian has in Jesus Christ. That's contentment. You might not see the bumper crop of your faith here on earth. It might be four fold year after four fold year. Each month, each day, each morning we are reliant upon his provision. But one day, when we see Jesus in full glory—we will have a harvest and a treasure we cannot imagine. The world envies what we have—will you let that promise draw you forward to Jesus even if it drives you away from worldly comforts?

This kind of living is evangelistic. When Christians live content in the Lord—the world notices. It wasn't long before the Philistines figured this out too. Lives satisfied in God become apparent to everyone else. Look at what happens next: **Genesis 26:26-33**, "When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that 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 be a sworn pact between us, 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." So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day."

Here is our final point this morning: **Grace Makes us Humble.**

In the past it was Isaac that sinned against Abimelech. But now we see that Abimelech has sinned against Isaac. Abimelech and his two highest ranking officials seek out Isaac just as Abimelech's father sought out Abraham.

Two things have become clear here. The first is that it was Abimelech who gave consent to the ploy to fill in those wells. Isaac now knows his heart, "You hate me." This would have been a clear breach of covenant between the two of them, and Isaac would have been justified to punish Abimelech. But another thing is made clear at this point. Abimelech and all of Gerar see the source of Isaac's blessing, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you."

From our perspective the suffering that God brings into our life often seems like a veiling of his blessing to us. But God often uses the suffering of the Christian to reveal the joy of Jesus to the lost. Who could find a well there, and there, and there, and there? Who in the midst of a famine has crops everywhere they go? Who can suffer through disease and still find happiness? Who can have little by worldly standards and yet be one of the more generous people you know? Who can be employed at a less than prestigious job and still carry themselves with purpose and poise? Those who the Lord is with. May we be of that lot.

And if you are not, see what peace is made for those who realize that. Isaac could have used his might and his power to punish Abimelech. But the man who had received grace, gave grace. He made a covenant. And in case you missed it, it just so happened that while they shook hands some men came in and said, "Isaac, you won't believe this...we found water."

Well, well, well. There's enough for all. Idolatry, sin, and our mistakes are nothing more than stolen worship. We have taken what the Lord has named for himself, and for his promise and we have

attempted to stop up, bottle up, and bungle up that grace every step of the way. But when we approach God's man of promise, he gives us mercy. He extends to us his favor, and like Isaac, those who have received God's grace are eager to give grace to others.

This is how God redeems us, and it is how God redeems our moments of sin. All of it points forward to the grace which calls us onward and provides for us everything we need in Jesus.