

Isaac Digged Again the Wells

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 0 0] I'd like us to think this morning for a little while about verse 18 that we read in Genesis chapter 26. And Isaac digged again the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father.

For the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham. And he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. Now there's quite a lot of different things in this verse.

First of all I'd like us to notice not simply the badness of the Philistines for stopping up these wells. Obviously there's a measure of envy when they want Isaac to leave.

And that they have stopped up the wells that Abraham had digged in his day and so on. Clearly they don't want anybody moving back and taking up residence where Abraham had been.

But the thing I'd like us to notice is not simply that they stopped them up. But they stopped them up after the death of Abraham. Now Abraham's visit to Gedar in very similar circumstances to Isaac's was, you know, it must have been about 90 years earlier.

[1 : 0 8] You find it in Genesis 20 how Abraham journeyed from the south. He dwelt between Kaddish and Shuri and he sojourned in Gedar. He also tries to pass off his wife as being his sister.

But he also is blessed and prospers whilst he is there in Gedar. But he then leaves Gedar. And as far as we know he doesn't go back again. So the best part of a century has passed since Abraham was there.

Now it doesn't mean that they've only just filled in the wells. But it does say, state explicitly, that they stopped them after the death of Abraham. In other words, although he never came back, his influence and the power of his presence and the memory of his being there had such an influence upon the Philistines of Gedar that for the whole of his life, his was such a presence in the wider land and in that part of the Holy Land that they didn't dare stop them up whilst he was there.

If he had chosen to come back and found them filled in, that would have been a source of quarrel with the king of Gedar. And they regarded him as a prophet. They regarded him as one who could intercede for them to the living God.

They did not want to antagonize Abraham. And although they had no love for Abraham or for the God that he worshipped, yet as long as he lived, those wells of water remained in place.

[2 : 3 9] And no doubt were a blessing to a great many people. Don't imagine just because Abraham had gone away and went somewhere else that nobody ever used that water again. People would have come to it. They would have watered their flocks and herds.

They would have got the benefit of it. But after he died, then the Philistines took a bit of courage and they filled in all the wells and they stopped them up.

His life, his influence was such that even in his absence, he could exert that force for good simply by being alive.

Simply by being there. Now, we have implications of that in quite a few places throughout Scripture. Of the influence of the Lord's people simply while they are alive.

Even if it's in the negative context. Even if it's in the sense of, you know, after their death, then bad things began to happen. We've got God's concern for his people that after the death of one significant servant, he would raise up another.

[3 : 42] And sometimes he doesn't, sometimes he doesn't. He leads them to fall into sin, to let them see just how much they depend on the living presence of God amongst his people.

You know, when Joshua is going to take over from Moses, the Lord says in Joshua chapter 1, verse 2, Moses, my son is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

In other words, if you don't do this, nobody else is going to do it. Moses is dead. He can't do it now. I've anointed you, Joshua. You have to do this now. If you don't do it, then everything is just going to slide.

We read, likewise, in the book of Judges, chapter 2, from verse 1. He deserved the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel.

You see the influence, the leavening influence of the living presence of servants of God, men of God, women of God, yes, by extension, amongst the people.

[4 : 55] And as long as they are in the midst, the people are faithful to the Lord. They serve the Lord. It might not be from the heart. It might just be because, well, this is what granny or grandpa wants us to do.

They still exert quite an influence through the family. So we'll have to do it and we'll have to do as they say and so on. And then when they die, we don't have to do that anymore. The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua.

Judges, chapter 2, verse 7. And all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being 110 years old.

And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timahaz, in the Mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers. And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Balaam. And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger.

[6 : 08] And then we read how the Lord raised up judges. And in verse 18 of the same chapter, And in the New Testament, Paul, remember, warns the elders of Ephesus when he takes his leave of them.

He says in Acts chapter 20, verse 28, Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Therefore watch and remember. And so on. So Paul is saying, you know, After I'm gone, others will rise up who will seek to do you harm. And this is the influence that God gives to those who remain faithful to him in their generation, that it may be for as long as they actually live, that bad things will be restrained.

Infidelity will be restrained. Sin will be restrained. There is an element in man's rebellious heart, which even if it longs and desires to do evil, is restrained by the fear of a godly man or woman whose influence and whose integrity is such that they fear to incur that wrath or that reaction.

[8 : 08] And I would suggest to you that this is what we have here with the Philistines. Well, where it says the Philistines have stopped them after the death of Abraham.

That implies as long as Abraham lived, the wells stayed open. Now, obviously, the spiritual implication for us should be clear enough. That if we seek to be faithful to the Lord, and we seek to honor him and serve him with all of our heart, and that is a rare thing in this generation, because the main problem with the church nowadays across so many denominations is not that nobody professes faith.

It's not that nobody believes. It's that even when people do, so often the Lord is not the actual priority. It is that the Lord is just one thing amongst many, and, you know, there's a bit of lukewarmness, and we can mix in a huge deal of the world in there too.

And if the Lord says that, yeah, but, you know, the world and my friends and my own values, they're saying this. And so God comes second quite often. And that is part of the problem with a generation of Christianity, because God has to be first.

When God comes first, it gives a certain spiritual power to the individual. It gives a certain strength, because when God is the priority, then it just exudes that kind of spiritual quiet power which people just will not go against, because the Lord is in the midst.

[9 : 42] Of that heart, that soul, and if they are the head of a family, of that family. That where the Lord is in the midst, the devil will back off until he sees a weakness.

And he will see a weakness, perhaps with the death of that patriarch, or with the death of that godly influence, that person, that man, or that woman. With the death of Abraham here, or with the death of the judge, in the days of the judges, or when that soul is taken away, he senses a weakness, and he gets in there then.

And then people say, oh, well, we don't need to do it in the old-fashioned way that Grandpa did. We've got these new gods, and new values, and new, more open-minded, tolerant, and sort of pluralist attitude that we can take to serving gods, and to doing our religion.

So that's the first point I need to recognize here. The silent influence of Abraham, way beyond his own sphere of dwelling, in so far as for his entire life, and it was a long life, the Philistines did not touch those wells.

But the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham. The venom and bitterness of the world does not cease. The prince of this world does not cease hating the Lord and the Lord's people just because he may be at a distance, just because he may be temporarily on the back foot, just because the Lord may fill some of his people with a certain spiritual power or influence, and the devil backs off.

[11 : 10] He hasn't gone away. Some of you may be old enough to remember the time when the IRA disarmed Ireland, and they tried to make it into a big sort of, a big kind of victory sort of parade.

And when people began to moan, hardline Republicans, about how it was all kind of political process and so on, the leader of Sinn Féin at the time said, they haven't gone away, you know.

And that was one of his famous phrases that everybody remembered. They haven't gone away, you know. In other words, the terrorists are still there. They're still in the background. We can still go back to the armed struggle any time we like.

And what is true there in the field of politics and revolution and terrorism is true with the devil himself. He hasn't gone away. No matter how strong a church or an individual or a person might be for a time, he will wait for his weakness.

He will wait for his moment. And it behoves us always to be vigilant. As Paul tells the Ephesians there, to watch and be vigilant, to make sure that they are clothed in the whole armor of God and to be strong against all the attacks of the evil one.

[12 : 19] Because this is the level of venom. Who wants to take water away from people who can use it? They need to be quite venomous for that. That's what the Philistines did here. So they stopped the wells.

But we read then that Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dugged in the days of Abraham's father. Now, he dugged them and he found the water.

And he went back to them. The water is there. The water hasn't gone away either. Just because, for example, in a certain generation, the church may be weak or the spiritual level of believers may be at a very low peak.

It doesn't mean that the Lord has gone away. It doesn't mean that the Lord is not still mighty to save. The water is still there. But it has to be reached. It has to be dugged for.

Now, we spoke to the children earlier about the Word of God being there in the pulpit and in the presenter's box and with the water being there too. Now, the Bible is a big book. Sixty-six books in it.

[13 : 19] If you're going to find the golden nuggets of God's truth, some of it is beautifully, wonderfully inspiring. Some of it is quite hard work to read through chapter after chapter of certain lists or whatever the case may be.

But it is worth digging and it is worth seeking because you dig through the Word of God. You find the precious water of life through it.

And yes, it may be to an extent hard work. It is infinitely harder work if the wells have been stocked up. You see, if as a Christian, you can have an influence on the next generation of young people or of young Christians or whatever so that they imbibe, as it were, naturally the things of God, the Word of God, the reading of the Bible and so on.

They imbibe it from whether their parents or their grandparents or whoever it is who's an influence upon them and they naturally go to it day by day. It's like a well that has been kept open.

It's still hard work in biblical times to drag the water out of the well and to lug it back like you read of Rebecca doing, you know, when she's young there when Abraham's servant comes with all his camels there in Genesis 24.

[14 : 35] But it's still hard work. You've still got to, you've still got to draw the water from the well. You've still got to do it. But it's an awful lot less hard work than having to actually dig the well, not knowing if you're going to find water at the end of the day.

There is water to be found. But it's harder to dig it up fresh than it is just to keep the well open. As most of you will be abundantly knowledgeable of every time I try and read the verses, I am not a garrick speaker.

If I were to attempt to learn the language properly, perhaps I could do it if I immersed myself in it and I studied all the vocabulary and all the grammar and really immersed myself in garrick books and had a tutor and was at it in a language lab with headphones day by day by day.

I might learn how to speak. I could converse with most of you in that way then if I knew it. But it would be much, much harder for me to have to dig for that water than it would be if I just grew up being able to blether it as a language to my parents or grandparents or whatever and I just took it in naturally.

If the well is kept open you just drink it in you just draw it in naturally and it becomes part of your everyday life. If you never had it or if the well has been stopped up you have to dig and digging is much, much harder work.

[15 : 58] And this is what Isaac is having to do. He's having to dig again for the physical water. If you and I do not transmit to the next generations of believers the truth of God not just that well you can find it in the Bible that's where to go but they have to see it lived out in us.

One of the biggest difficulties in the last half century across the church nationally has not been that the Bible has changed. It's that when people read it and they think well that can't be the case.

It can't mean it says that and why do they because nobody does that nowadays because the church doesn't do that nowadays. If this was what God meant the church would do it and it's not that God has changed or his word has changed it's just the church has now failed to keep faithful to his word and a variety of things and people say yeah but nobody does that so that can't be what it means.

They don't take their ultimate authority from what God's word says they look around and they say what are the Christians around me doing? If they're not doing this then obviously I shouldn't do it either because it's although it says it there in the Bible you know they must know better than me because they surely they've been Christians a lot longer than me they would do it if that's what God's word said they wouldn't live this way they'd live that way they live according to what God says so I must be getting it wrong how many young believers have been let us stray or put off because of the witness or example that they don't see from those who have been believers a lot longer than them unless we are conforming our lives to what God's word actually reveals unless we are whole hearted for the Lord the chinks in the armor will be seen and our failures and shortcomings will be exposed not just to the devil but even to other Christians who are looking for guidance looking for a way they want they expect to see in the lives of believers they expect to see a consistency of witness

God's word says it therefore God's people do it God's word says it therefore God's people think it God's word says it therefore God's people follow it as opposed to yeah but nowadays we tend to know a wee bit better and the world does this so you know we don't have to take everything that God's word says Isaac digged again the wells of water the water was still there it hadn't gone away but it had to be dug for and that's hard work it's harder work having to dig down into God's word and draw up the water and find what you need for day to day living and eventually have to come to some of the painful conclusions but but this is what God's word says and so much of the church is doing that and so much of the church is doing this and who's right who's wrong either God is wrong or man is wrong God cannot be wrong God is never wrong we are wrong often we fall short so often we do not live as we ought to do but by his grace and sanctifying power we may be enabled to do so he doesn't say oh well here's the valley but

[19 : 15] I know that's where my father dig but I'll dig over there instead I'll dig fresh ones I'll dig my own ones I'll be my own man I'll make my own statement no he finds the places where his father had found water before he goes back to those same places he doesn't assume that he knows better yes we have each to be witnesses in our own generation and every generation has different challenges and problems and things and ways in which the world has changed but human nature hasn't changed and God hasn't changed and there are things that we can learn and should learn from those who have gone before us I often wish that I was starting out either my Christian life or my ordinary life with half the stuff that I know now if I'd been starting out at 15, 16 then knowing what I know now I'd make an awful little bit or drop a bit because some things you only learn by experience but there is also the experiences of previous generations and they have sometimes written down and sometimes left testimony and sometimes witness to us of the problems that they have had and the struggles they have had which if you scratch away the surface of the outward wrapping are pretty much the same kind of problems and struggles that we have in our day

Isaac digged again the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father we don't want to sort of glorify the past just because it is the past but there is a sense in which we have lost something of the power and the purity of former days and faithfulness to the Lord Jeremiah the Lord says through him he says in chapter 6 verse 16 thus saith the Lord stand ye in the ways and see and ask for the old paths where is the good way and walk therein and ye shall find rest for your souls but they said we will not walk therein it's just like in Isaiah chapter 30 verse 15 where it says thus saith the Lord God the Holy One of Israel in returning and rest shall ye be saved in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength and ye would not for every olive branch of peace the Lord holds out to his people there is also a stubbornness of spirit in all of our hearts it says no I want to go my way

I want to do it my way what am I saying Isaac digged again the wells of water there is no use digging if all you're going to come up with is salt water or all you're going to come up with is bitter water it has to be the pure water of life which will feed our souls it's not something is not holy or good just because it is old paganism is older than reformed Christianity the reformation is 16th century paganism goes back thousands of years we don't say oh yeah this is better because it's of antiquity because it's old no we go back to the purity level if you were camping and you were and you have to go to fill your water bottle or whatever at a stream and then you see the carcass of a sheep just above where you're getting your bottle of water filled you're not going to fill it there but not are you going to say oh I won't touch that stream what you do is you go up above where the carcass you go higher up the hill nearer the source nearer the spring and you fill it there where the water is still pure is still clean you go back to before the corruption and you get your water at the pure source we go back before layers of man-made tradition obscures the pure teaching of God's word and you go back to the

Bible you go back to the word of God Isaac digged again the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father Abraham was the friend of God Abraham's power and influence was such that the Philistines would not stop up the wells even while he lived we have perhaps all known souls perhaps in our extended family whose influence perhaps as a matriarch or as a sort of head in the family was such that people were sort of held together they were like the glue that held the family together and they held it together often with a godliness and a faithfulness which is so often missing in our day and age but if we seek to the Lord and make him our priority and him our water of life which he freely offers to give remember like we said to the children that's what the Lord says right at the very end of his word whosoever will him that is a thirst let him come and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely he wants us to come the spirit and the bride say come let him that he would say come let him that is a thirst come and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely yes you may have to dig for it but at the end of the day it is pure water that we will find and we honour those who have gone before us not because they are old but because they are faithful this is what I think we should understand by he called their names after the names by which his father had called them and gave them the same names if it was good enough for

Abraham it's good enough for him the father and the son in that unity of covenant faithfulness but of course the devil is still in there and the first one that he did they strove for that saying the water is ours so if the water was there for they done the wells back again he called the name of it the well Essek which is contention is what it means and they digged another well they strove for that also he called the name of it Sitna which is hatred if these are the same names that Abraham had called the wells then he must have had hassle and argument with the herdmen of Gerar in history too these wells still call hatred still call contention and he removed from then said digged another well and for that they strove not and he called the name of it Rehoboth which means room said for now the Lord hath made room for us and we shall be fruitful in the land see part of the problem was that

[25 : 45] Isaac had been so blessed by the Lord that Philistines envied him but when he moved away at their requirement then they began to think well maybe it wasn't just that he was doing so well maybe actually he was blessed of the Lord if we go back a few verses we read that he sowed in the land and he reaped in the same year and the Lord blessed him now the reason he's gone down to Gerar in the first place if you go back to the beginning of chapter 26 is because there was a famine in the land and so he left his own land and he went to Gerar because there was famine all round about so in these famine years Isaac reeks a hundred fold now that is not a normal return on anybody's field or anybody's land this is miraculous blessing and perhaps the Philistines thought oh right okay he's made that field he's dug it up he's ploughed it he's sowed it and he got a hundred fold it let's get rid of him now we can get the field and we can get the hundred fold and then they found to their surprise that once

Isaac was gone the field did not yield a hundred fold because God blessed Isaac wasn't a piece of ground in and of itself so they came seeking him out the king of Gerar after he went down to Geer Sheba which is much further south than Gerar he went back to where his father had dwelt and he settled there and they came seeking him out and they came wanting to make peace with him the book of Proverbs tells us in chapter 16 verse 7 when a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him and so they make peace between the Philistines and Isaac and he forgives them and he makes a feast for them and initially he's a bit surprised as to why they've come you know why is it that you're seeking me out since you hate me you've set me away from you and they say we saw certainly that the Lord was with thee and we said let there be now an oath betwixt us even between us and thee and let us make a covenant with thee whatever they thought about Isaac they could see the

Lord was with them and the devil is afraid of the Lord's presence this is something we have to grasp the devil is not afraid of you and me he is not scared of us we are flesh and blood he is a pure spirit in the sense of a powerful spirit he's not confined by a flesh and blood body he can transform himself into anything even into an angel of life if he wants to he is not scared of us his power is infinitely greater than ours but he is terrified of the Lord Jesus Christ he is terrified of God that's why when Jesus comes into a synagogue the devil screams out in the midst of the possessed person what have we got to do with thee Jesus of Nazareth I know who you are the Holy One if you come to torment us before the time the devil is always the one who speaks first when Jesus enters the room the devil is always the one who reacts when Jesus comes into the synagogue when the Lord Jesus Christ is in a home or in a heart then the devil will flee that is what

James tells us submit to God resist the devil and he will flee from you as it says in the chronicles you won't have to fight in this battle the Lord says to Jehoshaphat just be faithful and the Lord's presence the Lord's action will cause the devil to back off he is not afraid of you he is terrified of the Lord and the Lord's presence with Isaac made the Philistines want to make peace with him but as we said earlier such can be one's influence if one is truly seeking to be faithful to the Lord that is an influence beyond which we could imagine Abraham would not have known physically or mentally that the Philistines were holding off filling in those wells while he moved and that when he finally died then he went and filled them in he wouldn't have known the influence that his life had beyond the borders of his own dwelling place he wouldn't have imagined it and most of us live in blissful ignorance of the impact or impression that our lives may have on those around us like a pebble dropped in the pond we don't see where the ripples will reach to we don't see the connections and the network that our lives may interconnect with others and the influence that we may have for good or evil but every generation needs the presence of the

Lord and it does not follow that just because one is godly their children or grandchildren will likewise be the same this chapter ends with this tragic situation Esau was 40 years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Elah the Hittite and Basham the daughter of Elah the Hittite which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah now Esau was the favourite son of Isaac and by all the evidence that we have Esau likewise loved Isaac adored his daddy he he is he is not seeking here to think how can I really annoy my kids I know I'll go and take Canaanite wives in fact I'll take not just one I'll take two that will really wind them up he is not seeking to do that that would not suggest that Esau is of a malicious intent it is simply that it hasn't crossed his mind to do anything other than simply what pleases him the Lord's covenant is not in his mind in his head the Lord's obedience is not in his heart his birthright he doesn't care for he sells it for a mess of pottage he's not really bothered about Isaac's blessing except in so far it will enhance his own position it does not cross his mind to do anything other than what pleases himself and this is what the vast majority of those who dwell without the

[32 : 05] Lord this is their situation it's not that they're anti-Christian most of them some are but very few really most people are not against the Lord and wanting to annoy Christians and really wind up their godly parents or grandparents or whatever they're not trying to rub people's nose it's just you know this is what I want to do so this is what I'm going to do why shouldn't I why life and they don't just don't think what are the implications for your heart for your life for your relationship with the Lord clearly Esau doesn't even have a relationship with the Lord and if he did then this is going to kill it so bad because there will be two great loves in somebody's life if they are a believer there will be the Lord and will be their spouse and if these two are at loggerheads with each other then somewhere along the line there is going to be a divorce either those two individuals will grow cold towards each other and one will say I should never have married so and so because I love the

Lord and that was a mistake and so on or there will be a gradual quiet divorce between the believer and the Lord because they will cleave faster to their unbelieving spouse and they think oh no that won't be the case because I'll change them and I'll bring them more to the Lord okay let's say you've got a cold bath and you've got a hot bath boiling water and you've got a big enough bath to pour the two into one what are you going to have are you going to have boiling water after that no you're not going to have boiling water are you going to have freezing cold water no you're not going to have that either but if you want a hot bath and you pour the two together the boiling not only that but all you have to do for that lukewarm to go stone cold is just leave it just do nothing and all you have to do for a heart that loved the Lord to go cold is nothing just don't dig the wells just don't have any water just do nothing just let it drift and you will perish and it will die the love for the

Lord and the relationship with the Lord it is going to be hard work to get back in Isaac digged again the wells of water which we had digged in the days of Abraham his father you are going to have to work at it we each have to work at building our relationship with the Lord day by day bite by bite you know as I've quoted in the past a South African bishop is reported to have said there is only one way to eat an elephant one mouthful at a time and there is likewise only one way to come to the word of God one mouthful at a time verse by verse chapter by chapter day by day nobody is going to be able to sit down curl up on the couch and open the Bible at Genesis chapter 1 and just stay there with a mug of coffee until we finish Revelation 22 you are going to take it a bite of the time you are going to chew it swallow it digest it it is going to be food for your soul and building your life on that is going to be hard work

Isaac digged again the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham's father for the Philistine had stopped them after the death of Abraham and he called the names after names by which his father had called them he got the water back yes he had to fight for it yes he had to defend it but he kept on digging and he kept on striving until the Lord made room for him and he could enjoy the water of life freely that is what Jesus says a spirit and a bride say come and whosoever will let him come and him that is a thirst let him come and let him take the water of life freely it is worth digging for it is worth finding it is worth drawing it is worth drinking it is the difference between life and death for the Doppler zero value her.

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