

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 301

Isaac – and the Well

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 6th June, 2010**

Text: *“And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi” (Genesis 25. 11).*

We are not told remarkable things in the Word of God concerning Isaac. Some people would say, compared with his father Abraham and his son Jacob, he appears almost insignificant in the pages of holy Scripture. He did not seem to have many outstanding things happening to him, many amazing deliverances, many things to be spoken about. But we have this recorded of him: that God blessed him. And beloved friends, that is the one thing that matters. I do not know whether you noticed in reading the following chapter, the twenty-sixth chapter, three times we have it, that God blessed Isaac. And really when we come to the end of our days, it does not really matter whether we are well-known, or who we are, or what we are, or whether we had wonderful experiences, or whether we had a trembling hope. It is this: if only God blesses us, blesses us with His salvation, with His love, with the knowledge of Himself, with cleansing in the Saviour's blood, with the forgiveness of sins, with a preparation for heaven. God blessed him. It would be a wonderful thing if each one in this chapel knows something of the blessing of the Lord.

[Last Thursday evening the text was: “Give me a blessing.] So in a sense it is the same subject as Thursday evening. Let me ask you a personal question: how many of you went home on Thursday evening praying, “Lord, give *me* a blessing”? Because if you did, He will. O to have this testimony: *and God blessed him*.

But have you also noticed this, that God is spoken of in Scripture as “the God of Isaac”? He is the God of Abraham – I take that to be the God of the covenant. He is the God of Jacob – I take that to be the God of all grace. But “the God of Isaac.” I heard one of the old preachers explaining it like this, and I thought it was very scriptural: the God of providential detail. It is a wonderful thing if God blesses you and me like that, overruling all the providential details of our lives, the small things as well as the great. And no doubt you must have noticed that Genesis chapter 24, the preceding chapter to this, the chapter which speaks of how a wife was sought for Isaac, is one of the longest chapters in the Bible. Do

you know, there is more in the Book of Genesis about how a wife was provided for Isaac than there is about the creation of the world! That is the God of Isaac. That is what it means: God blessed him. Almighty God was interested in every detail of his life. And if you are amongst those who know and fear the Lord, Almighty God is interested in every detail of your life. “Your life’s minutest circumstance is subject to His eye.” There is nothing too hard for the Lord to manage in your life and there is nothing too small, beneath God’s notice.

“God blessed ... Isaac.” Just a few things about the character of Isaac. He was a godly man. One thing was the humble submission he showed when his father was seemingly going to sacrifice him. We often speak of Abraham’s faith on Mount Moriah. What about Isaac’s? His father was an aged man. Isaac was a young, strong man. He could easily have escaped. But the humble submission. You see the grace there. God blessed him, and it was concerning that event that that word was spoken, and Isaac heard it: “Jehovah-jireh.” Never forget, Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide, in its first beginnings was spoken concerning Isaac and in Isaac’s hearing and Isaac proved it all through his life. Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide. O it is a beautiful promise! It still stands today. And in a New Testament sense, “My God shall supply all your need” – all of it – “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” The God of Isaac, and “God blessed ... Isaac.”

We do find that Isaac was a man of prayer. We read later how he was brought in real concern in some of the trials of his early married life, and, “Isaac intreated the Lord.” And all whom God blesses will be praying people. Another thing is this: we read that he went out to meditate in the evening. Not many people are blessed with a spirit of sweet meditation. Philpot once said it is the most spiritual of all graces. There is faith, there is hope, there is love. Meditation – it is like a bird flying and when its wings stop moving, the bird comes down to earth. It would be a wonderful thing if we knew more of the spirit of meditation.

“Come, poor sinners, come away,
In meditation sweet.”

Let me just mention one other thing, not to linger too long on Isaac’s character, and it is this: we are told he loved his wife. Well, every husband should love his wife, shouldn’t he? But I think he is the only person in Scripture of whom we are told, he loved his wife. And have you

noticed that Isaac only had one wife, Rebekah, and he loved her? I know when they were old they had some difficulties and some problems. Have you ever wondered why our wedding hymn ends up,

“As Isaac and Rebecca give
A pattern chaste and kind”?

Well, Abraham set a bad example with Hagar, and Jacob had his Rachel and his Leah, and then you come to David, the man after God’s own heart, with all his wives, and what about Solomon, when he had a thousand? But not Isaac. He took Rebekah into his tent and he loved her and he is a blessed example of married life from the Old Testament that is carried on into the New, and that even comes in our wedding hymns today.

There is so much concerning Isaac, what he was and what he did and what he did not do and his character. One thing struck me this morning. I wonder if things ever strike you when we are reading the Bible passage, things that have never struck you before. I find this happens continually with me. What struck me this morning? Well, we read in chapter 26 one or two things that Isaac did, and they were not specially good; they were not good at all; they were deceitful. But almost the next verse you read that God blessed Isaac. What do we have to say here? “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Mind you, God will chastise His people for their sins, yet mercy reigns and the blessing of the Lord is on the grounds of mercy, and really every blessing that any sinner has ever known in the Old Testament or the New flows through the atonement of Jesus, the death He died, the blood He shed. There is no blessing for a guilty sinner out of Christ. The law can only condemn; the law can only curse. By nature we are under the curse, the condemnation of the law. But do you know what the secret of it is, and it is a most beautiful verse? “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Now that is the ground of blessing.

“Every grace and every favour
Comes to us through Jesus’ blood.”

“The God of Isaac.” And He blessed him. Lingering on this point, that is what we want – not just that God blessed Isaac and Isaac is now in

heaven, but that Isaac's God might bless us, despite our unworthiness and sin, that He may not pass us by. "Give *me* a blessing." "Oh that Thou wouldest bless *me* indeed!" "Remember *me*, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit *me* with Thy salvation."

"And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac." Now Abraham was a great man. He was the friend of God. He was the father of the faithful. But he was taken away, taken away by death, and that was a sad loss for Isaac and he felt it, but "after the death of Abraham ... God blessed his son Isaac." Isaac lost his beloved father and he felt it severely, but he did not lose his God. Abraham's God was his God. Abraham's God was still with him. Now in your pilgrimage you know all kinds of changes. There are days of sadness. There are things you lose. There are things come upon you that you wish did not come upon you. Yet the Lord is still with His people. "The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people."

"It came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac." Almighty God has a special ability to sanctify bereavement. How many have said, "The Lord hath chastened me sore: but He hath not given me over unto death"! O how many have felt, "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies"! "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac." It does seem in the mysterious providence of God that often He uses the time of sorrow to visit His people and to bless them. He makes the clouds His chariot. Let us be clear: not that sorrow, not that affliction in itself brings the blessing, but God in love and mercy so often balances the clouds, and where He gives sorrow, He also gives joy; where He takes away, He also gives. And when there is a trial, then He gives the blessing.

"It came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi." I just want to say one or two things about Lahai-roi. It was, of course, the place where God met with Hagar when He found her in the wilderness running away from her mistress Sarai, and when He told her to return and when Hagar said, "Thou God seest me" (Genesis 16). And that fountain of water there, she called it Lahai-roi, the well of the living One who seeth me. She proved that it was an all-seeing eye, and she proved it in mercy, and she proved that nothing

was hidden from it, and she proved that eye was upon her to supply her need. She called the place Lahai-roi. Isaac always seems to have been concerned about this well Lahai-roi. At the end of chapter 24, we have Isaac coming from Lahai-roi.

I do not know whether any of you have read Alexander Whyte's *Bible Characters*. At times he seems fanciful and whether he is right or not, he says Isaac's nurse Hagar must have told him about Lahai-roi, told him how God had spoken to her at this place Lahai-roi. And Isaac never forgot. But Alexander Whyte says this: that children never forget those things that are spoken to them in the early days of their infancy. Well, whether this is just imagination or whether it is true, we have to leave, but certainly there is so much about Isaac and Lahai-roi and Lahai-roi and Isaac.

But that is a very true point – you mothers, the influence that you can have upon your children even if they are very tiny. They never forget some of the things that you tell them, an influence for good or for evil. It is a very precious charge that is given to you. “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.” Our hymnwriter Philip Doddridge traced his spiritual beginning to when he was a tiny boy and by the fire they had Dutch tiles with Bible scenes, and when he was tiny his mother used to speak about these Bible scenes, and the Lord sealed it in his heart. None are too young to be impressed by the truth of God under the sacred influence of the Spirit.

“And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.” Isaac was to prove what Hagar had proved, the meaning of Lahai-roi, the living One who seeth me. He proved that God could see him. There is a solemn side to it; there is a blessed side to it. And that watchful care, that tender mercy. Really in its simplest sense,

“He sees when I am sunk in grief,
And quickly flies to my relief.”

That God who sees, that God who looks after me. May you and I know the blessings of Lahai-roi.

“And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.” People have described Isaac as *the man of the well*. Often they have described

Abraham as *the man of the tent*. But Isaac, the man of the well. There is so much in the life of Isaac about wells. That is why I read the twenty-sixth chapter instead of the twenty-fifth, because there is so much about Isaac digging wells and dwelling by wells and the strife about wells and the clearing up of the wells that the Philistines had filled in, and the finding a well where there was no strife. Of course, all this was literal and natural, because the one point about the well is this, and it came out very, very clearly in chapter 26: if you found a well, it was a most treasured possession, especially in desert lands and in the wilderness and in that dry climate where there was not much rain. It was a most precious possession, if you could find a well or if you lived near a well.

But surely it is not wrong, as the Word of God spiritualises the well so often, for us to think of this in more than a carnal way. “And Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.” When he pitched his tent, when he married his wife, when he had set up his home, he wanted it to be near a well. Of course, there is a vital, spiritual application here. You younger married ones, do you dwell by a well in your own home? You have the Word of God there. We are told that “the mouth of a righteous man is a well of life.” You have the mouth of a righteous man in God’s holy Word. Do you dwell by that well? Do you read it together? What about the altar? We find that Isaac set up an altar too. Have you a family altar and do you thank the Lord for His mercies? Do you ask His blessing upon the food? What about the example to your children, your little ones? Do you pray in the time of need? Above all, do you seek that the Lord will make you right for eternity? Do you ever have to say, “Give me a blessing”? Are you an Isaac in your married life, in your home? Do you want to dwell by the well?

And then concerning the house of God, in a gospel pulpit there is a springing well. I have often told you when I first went out to preach, old Mr. E.G. Rowell wanted to see me. He told me a lot of things. It was almost like a charge to a new minister. He said, “You will find in a gospel pulpit there is a springing well, and that well keeps on springing and it keeps on flowing.” There is certainly a springing well in this pulpit. Otherwise how could we have continued all these years, apart from just saying the same thing over and over again, week by week. There is a springing well here.

Now if your religion is real, you will want to dwell close to the well. You will love the house of God. You will say,

“There have I been, and there would go;
’Tis like a little heaven below.”

You will say, “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.” If you are making arrangement where to live, if you are making arrangements concerning your happenings and your events during the week, you will make your arrangements so that the house of God comes first, and it will not be in a legal sense. It will be,

“Jesus, how heavenly is the place,
Where Thy dear people wait for Thee!”

This is it. This is the well:

“Where the rich fountain of Thy grace
Stands ever open, full, and free.”

“And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.” But above all, to speak of Christ and the blessings of the gospel, that well of the water of life. And Isaac dwelt by it, and you will want to dwell by it. He did not dwell by that well so he could just smile and visit it and look at it; he wanted to draw water from it; he wanted to drink from it; he wanted it to refresh him; he wanted it to satisfy him; he wanted it to cleanse him. That is why he dwelt by the well Lahai-roi. O that inestimable blessing we know so little of experimentally: nearness to Christ, nearness to the Saviour, “made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

“O Christ, He is the Fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love.”

And we want to dwell near Him; we want to dwell by Him; we want to receive of His fulness, “and grace for grace.” Why do we want to dwell by the well Christ Jesus? Because in our hearts there is that spiritual longing, that spiritual thirst that was not there by nature and which nothing else but Christ can satisfy.

“Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me!”

“All my springs,” says the psalmist, “are in Thee.” I have not got any anywhere else. There is nothing else can satisfy me. There is nothing

in the world. But by nature we try to find satisfaction and peace and contentment in the world (don't we?), all of us by nature. But when the new birth takes place, when there is a new nature, when we are made new creatures in Christ, when there is a new longing, a new thirsting, we find that the best the world can give is nothing but "broken cisterns, that can hold no water." That is the conclusion Almighty God has made concerning the best this world can give, its religion, its ambitions, its love, its pleasure, its everything. "Broken cisterns, that can hold no water." That is a telling figure. It is not pure, crystal, fresh water; it is only cistern water. It is not really fresh; it is polluted. But the cisterns are broken. It is all running out.

"Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show."

There is not much water left. "Broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Many of you have proved that, haven't you? and some of you are proving it now. O but the more you go after the broken cisterns of this world, the more they will disappoint you, till in the end you will have to come to that well of living water that springs from eternal love, and you will say, "Give me Christ, or else I die."

O but this well of living water springing up to everlasting life! The prophet says, "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." With joy. You will not draw water with joy from the broken cisterns of this world. There is a very solemn word: "wells without water." And the figure is this: there is a weary traveller going through the desert and in the end he sees a well, and it thrills him; he hastens on. When he gets there, it is dry. That is the best the world can give, and you will prove it, painfully prove it. Wells that can hold no water. "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water." It is by faith that a living soul draws water from the wells of salvation.

Perhaps some of you say, But just wait a moment. There is only one *well* of salvation – surely that is Christ – and the prophet speaks of the *wells*. I take it to be something like this: "O Christ, He is the Fountain, the deep, sweet well of love"; but when we talk about "wells of salvation," we think of His love, His faithfulness, His forgiveness, the peace He gives, His glorious righteousness, His precious blood, the promises. All these things bound up with Christ are so many "wells of salvation."

“The wells of salvation.” O may there be some of you even this morning with joy drawing water from the wells of salvation. May there be someone here like the woman of Samaria when Jesus sat on the well: “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.” “Whosoever drinketh of this water” – whether you take that to be Jacob’s well or whether you take it to be anything in this world – “whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

“And Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.” May we through mercy be dwelling by the well in our homes and here at Bethel and especially led by the Spirit, brought close to Christ. O to see those streams of love and mercy that flow eternally from beneath the throne of God and the Lamb and that flow from the death of Christ, the smitten rock in the wilderness! “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” And these waters do not fail; they do not dry up; they do not disappoint; they refresh; they satisfy; there is salvation in them. And if ever through faith you taste of the water of these wells, the wells of salvation, it will be this:

“The streams on earth I’ve tasted,
More deep I’ll drink above.”

“And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.” Just one last word I leave with you: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.”