

Sojourning For Home

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 March 2013

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Genesis 21, and we'll read verses 22 to the end of the chapter. Genesis 21, 22.

Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized. But Abimelech said, I don't know who has done this.

You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today. So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty.

Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, and Abimelech asked Abraham, What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?

He replied, Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well. So the place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

[1:25] After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his forces, returned to the land of the Philistines.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the Lord, the eternal God. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Abraham, well, if you are a Christian, you know homesickness. You know the ache of wanting to go home.

I don't mean your mailing address. Some of my favorite passages in literature capture that feeling or capture home.

Tolkien's description of Rivendale, which is the last homely house, when I read that, it wakes up that feeling. His house was perfect.

[2:24] Whether you liked food or sleep or work or storytelling or singing or just sitting and thinking best or a mixture of them all, evil things did not come in that valley.

Merely to be there was a cure for weariness, fear, and sadness. There's another passage that I even like better than that one.

It comes from the book *The Wind and the Willows*. And if you haven't read it, you really should. It's the story of Mole and Rat and Mr. Badger and Mr. Toad.

And Mr. Toad takes to driving cars out in the countryside and crashing them all over the place. One day, Rat and Mole are trapped out in the wild wood.

And it's a cold day. It's a winter's day. And in the middle, while they're in the wild wood, a blizzard kicks up. They get lost in the snow and they're bumping and kicking their toes and their shins against branches and logs until finally, accidentally, they come across Mr. Badger's house who lives deep in the wild wood.

[3:35] And Mr. Badger opens the door for them and lets them in. And then it says this. He shuffled on in front of them, carrying the light, and they followed him, nudging each other in an anticipating sort of way down a long, gloomy, and to tell you the truth, decidedly shabby passage into a sort of a central hall out of which they could dimly see other long, tunnel-like passages branching.

Passages mysterious and without apparent end. But there were doors in the hall as well, stout, oaken, comfortable-looking doors. And one of these, the Badger flung open, and at once they found themselves in the glow and the warmth of a large, fire-lit kitchen.

And the floor was well-worn red brick. And the wide hearth burnt a fire of logs between two attractive chimney corners tucked away in the wall.

And a couple of high-backed chairs facing each other on either side of the fire gave further sitting accommodations for the socially disposed. In the middle of the room stood a long table of plain boards placed on trestles with benches down each side.

And at one end of it, there was an armchair where spread the remains of the Badger's plain but ample supper. And rows of spotless plates winked from the shelves of the dresser at the far end of the room.

[5:03] And from the rafters overhead hung hams and bundles of dried herbs and nets of onions and baskets of eggs. It seemed a place where heroes could fitly feast after victory.

Where weary harvesters could line up in scores along the table and keep their harvest home with mirth and song. Or where two or three friends of simple taste could sit there as they pleased and eat and smoke and talk and comfort and contentment.

The kindly Badger thrust them down on a chair to toast themselves at the fire and bade them remove their wet coats and boots. And then he fetched them dressing gowns and slippers and himself bathed the mole's shin with warm water and mended the cut with sticking plaster till the whole thing was just as good as new, if not better.

In the embracing light and warmth, warm and dry at last, with weary legs propped up in front of them, and a suggestive clink of plates being arranged on the table behind, it seemed to the storm-driven animals, now in safe anchorage, that the cold and the trackless wild wood just left outside was miles and miles away.

And all that they had suffered in a half-forgotten dream. You're probably wondering why I'm talking about all this.

[6:33] Simply because this is where Abraham ends up at the end of Genesis 21. A lot of times in narratives and in parables, when you're telling a story, what comes at the end is the key that unlocks the door.

Everything else is leading up to that point. And so chapter 21 has been bringing us to this point. We've looked at it over the last few weeks, and it brings us to our destination.

Verses 33 and 34. Look at it again with me. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree, or maybe a tamarisk grove, in Beersheba.

And there he called upon the name of the Lord, the eternal God. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time. Now, we all ask in our hearts, deep in our hearts, when will I finally be able to go home?

When will I be able to go home? When will I be able to make it, leave the wildwood, and come to a place of warmth and rest?

[7:49] How do you get there? Well, when we take in Genesis 21, the whole chapter, you get the answer. And it's this. When God fulfills his promises, then we will be at rest.

Then we will be home. When God fulfills his promises, we will be home. Now, that's where we're going. That's our destination, these last two verses. And so with that, we can start looking at the passage that was read.

It's a little story of Abraham and Abimelech and the covenant, the treaty that they make together. And so we start in verse 22. And here's our first point.

Abimelech sues for peace. Abimelech sues for peace. He seeks peace. So verse 22. At that time. That's the same time as the Hagar and Ishmael incident.

Moses is orienting us. He's connecting this story to that story, which is in itself connected to the birth of Isaac story. And so Moses is connecting this whole chapter together.

[8:59] At that time, Abimelech visited Abraham. Now, you remember Abimelech. He's the king of Gerar. Abraham had a run-in with him earlier. Abraham lied about his wife Sarah to him, and it nearly cost Abimelech his life.

And so now Abimelech comes seeking peace. And he says, God is with you in everything that you do. Sort of like what we saw in Sunday school this morning.

And everything that Joseph was doing, God was with him, and it prospered. And so God is with you in everything you do. Well, what did he mean? Abimelech probably has a couple things in mind, but maybe the first thing that we would think of is the birth of Isaac.

Abraham, no doubt, Abraham's 100, Sarah was 90, and the birth of their child probably reached Abimelech's ears.

And he's also probably seen Abraham's growing wealth and prosperity. Everything that Abraham is involved in, God prospers. And so Abraham is probably and most likely the most powerful man in Abimelech's kingdom.

[10:10] Abimelech sees this, and he wants peace. There's been this rough patch before, and now he wants to patch things up, smooth things over. And so this is what he says.

Swear to me that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. I just want to stop there and just know that it is rather sad when a pagan king has to say no more lying to me, to Abraham.

Swear to me that you won't deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me in the country where you are living the same kindness that I have shown you. In other words, no more lying, Abraham.

No more deceit. I've been kind to you. I've let you live in my land. I haven't harassed or bothered you. So now be kind and fair with me in return. And Abraham says, I swear it.

And so a treaty, a peace, is made. Now, why is this here? Why is this story here? Well, Moses is showing us the path, the pathway to peace, to home.

[11:19] Each section of this chapter is a stepping stone to our destination, to the very last two verses. And as long as there's political danger and political turmoil, as long as the people of God are at war with the kings of this earth, there can be no peace.

But he's also showing us that when God fulfills his promises, there will be peace. That's the pathway home.

So it's not the UN. It's not the UN. It's not the best efforts of man, as good as they may be, that's finally going to bring peace to God's people. God promises to Abraham had an international aspect, didn't they?

They weren't just for that small family. He had in mind something much greater. Remember back in Genesis 12, he said, I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse.

And all peoples, all nations on earth will be blessed through you. Now, we've seen this principle in Ashen before. So when Abraham went down to Egypt and Pharaoh took Sarah, the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his people.

[12:36] Now, when Abimelech took Sarah, it nearly cost Abimelech his life. And besides that, Abimelech's whole household was unable to conceive during that time.

Their wombs were closed. Now, that's the negative side of this promise. But here we get to see the positive side of the promise. Those who bless you will be blessed. And so Abimelech comes making peace, asking for friendship, bringing blessing.

Now, a king making peace with God's people, it is a rare thing. It's a rare thing in this world. But it does happen, and it will happen ultimately.

Abimelech is a type. And this is what we see in this passage. He's a type. He's a shadow of what is going to be. Psalm 72, speaking of the Davidic king and ultimately the Messiah, says this.

The kings of Tarshish, which is on the far side of the Mediterranean. The kings of Tarshish and the distant shores will bring tribute to him. The kings of Sheba and Seba, which were as far south as you could on the ancient map.

[13:55] They will present him gifts. All kings will bow down to him, and all nations will serve him. Or Isaiah 60 says, then, he's speaking of God's new covenant people after the redemption.

Then you will look and be radiant. Your heart will throb and well with joy. The wealth of the seas will be brought to you. Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and the kings will serve you.

So, the kings of the earth will come in peace, and they will come in blessing. And we see a hint of it here in Abimelech.

And when that happens, God's promises will be fulfilled. He has that in mind. That is the end. That is the direction. And then, when God keeps those promises, then and only then, will we be at home. Will we have peace. Now, we move to our second point here. And so, they've made a treaty of friendship.

[15:02] They've sworn oaths to each other to be friendly to one another. And now, secondly, we see that Abraham secures water by a covenant.

Beersheba is a well. It's a well of water. And he secures this water by covenant, by making a promise. Now, Moses here, he brings us right into the daily in and outs, the concerns and the wheeling and dealing of ancient desert life.

So, Abraham had dug a well of Abimelech's servants, had seized it. And now, that put Abraham in a precarious position.

Because you know, in the desert, water is life. You find gold and silver, but you have no water. You're as good as dead. But water is life.

And so, this is no small debate then. This is serious business. They can't have peace. And Abraham won't be able to stay here as long until he can secure this well.

[16:11] And so, he does what people did back then. He makes a covenant. And he gives seven ewe lambs from his flock as a seal, as a guarantee of this covenant between them.

Now, it is difficult to understand, well, what are we supposed to take away from this? What does this interesting, yet not entirely very important historical incident have to do with us?

Why would Moses feel like he wants to include this for Israel? And why would the Holy Spirit want us to have it in our Bibles? Reading about it and hearing about it today.

Well, I think we need to put our theological glasses on. Why is this little incident included? It's an ordinary covenant made with ordinary lambs over some ordinary water.

Is it here just for historical interest? I don't think so. Genesis is a theological book. It's written for theological purposes. God is teaching us about himself and how he works.

[17:21] And so, I think we can see in this a picture of something greater than the historical incident itself.

It is part of a bigger story. And the Old Testament often has these little pictures. It's hard to understand why they're there.

And then, with the New Testament in mind, we can look back and we can see that God was showing Israel. He was showing us something of his plan.

Now, to Moses. So, we want to put our theological glasses on. It's part of a bigger story. Now, to Moses, lambs and covenants are important.

In the very next chapter, the all-important question is going to come from Isaac. Where is the lamb for the burnt sacrifice? And you remember God's answer, or Abraham's answer.

[18:17] God himself will provide the sacrifice. He'll provide the lamb. Or in the book of Exodus, Moses speaking again. The Passover lamb, it guaranteed the safety and the security of God's people when the angel of death came and killed the sons of Egypt.

And so, there's no end to the examples that we can give of how important lambs are and covenants are. And so, I think the Spirit of God in writing this wants us to see more than just a mildly historical, interesting historical event.

He wants us to see a picture of Jesus. Now, would the Old Testament people have understood that totally? I don't think so.

But Jesus Christ is the hub that every spoke attaches to. This passage whispers his name. So, just as Abraham's covenant secured water in the desert, and just as his lambs guaranteed that this well was his, that it belonged to him, that he had the right to it, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, secures for us a much greater well, a much greater water.

He secures us the true river of life. And so, he secures for us the new covenant, which is in his blood. And that covenant secures that God is ours.

[19:51] And God, with whom is the fountain of life, is ours. And so, he is yours, brother or sister. He is yours. And you are his. You have the right to drink from that river of life.

Because the Lamb of God was handed over to give you that right. Now, this is also part of that theme of getting us home, getting us to the place of peace.

Without water, Abraham cannot live here. He cannot stay here. And without Jesus securing for us the river of life, God himself, we'll never find home.

Because God is the home. God is the place of peace. And without Jesus Christ, we can never have him. We can never be on good terms with him.

And so, Jesus Christ himself must be handed over, lay down his life, in order that we someday could have a place that we could call home.

[20:58] Now, building on that covenant between Abraham and Abimelech, building on that promise, we come to our third point, and that is that Abraham lives in blessedness and peace.

So, out of this covenant with Abimelech, Abraham lives in peace and blessedness. Everything is flowing to verses 33 and 34 in Abraham's shalom, his peace.

And so, we read verses 33 and 34 already. So, let's take in the picture again. Take in the picture again. Abraham has his well.

He has his water. An ever-flowing supply of water. Every morning it is there. Every evening it is there. And then he plants a tree, or a grove of trees. It could be taken either way. And so, then what does he do? He worships. He worships God, the Lord. He calls upon Yahweh. Yahweh, that's God's covenant name.

[22:01] And then Moses adds on there, the eternal God. And so, when Abraham arrives to the place of peace, he worships God, the covenant-keeping, eternal God.

So, there is a tree, there is water, and there is worship. Now, brothers and sisters, that's the biblical picture of peace, of blessedness.

When you get there, you're happy. You're truly blessed. Psalm 1, Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. Blessed. What is he like?

He's like a tree planted by streams of water. And through this, you can hear echoes of Eden, of our first home.

And ever since we've had to leave there, we've been homesick. And so, at the center of the Garden of Eden was the Tree of Life, and flowing through the garden were the four rivers. And now here, Abraham is.

[23:08] So, do you hear what Genesis 21 is saying? In a limited, in a very small, anticipatory way, Abraham has made it home.

He's made it back to Eden. Now, was this his home ultimately? No. The New Testament says that he was still, he was always looking forward to heaven.

Stephen, in Acts 7, he says he didn't own a foot of the land that God had promised him. This was not his home ultimately. He was ultimately looking for a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

But, in a small, anticipatory, in a limited way, Abraham had made it home. Just like Canaan, and the possession of the promised land was a picture of heaven.

And so here, this is a picture of home, of heaven. And the most important question is, is what brought him here?

[24:14] How did he get here? Remember, he was from far away. He was down in Ur of the Chaldees. He was worshipping other gods.

Now, what has brought him to this place so many years later? Well, the answer of Genesis 21 is that God kept his promises.

God kept his promises. God's promises fulfilled, kept, brought Abraham to this place of peace and joy. Now, think about over the whole chapter, over what we've looked at over the last few weeks. We've looked at it in small bits and small chunks. But I want you to now take a bird's eye view of all of chapter 21 and see how each of them is contributing and bringing you to the place of verses 33 and 34.

So Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 when God gave them this miracle baby, Isaac. And so now, he sits under his tree beside his well and as he sits there, he sees little Isaac walking in and out of the tents, chattering with the servants.

[25:28] sitting with his mother. What joy filled Abraham's heart as he's sitting there under his tree beside his well. In Isaac, he could see the faithfulness and the love and the grace of God.

It was there right before his eyes. But there's more. With Isaac's coming, Hagar and Ishmael left. We talked about that last week.

They're gone. And yes, that caused grief. But now Isaac is safe. Isaac is safe.

Ishmael was a powerful enemy for Isaac. And there's peace in the family after years of strife. ever since Sarah had that really bad idea to have Hagar bring a child for Abraham, you could tell there's been tension.

[26:30] There's been fighting. And there's the sword in the family. And so now, after years of strife, there's peace because the unbelieving have been put away. And isn't that something of the peace that we long for?

The sword is at work in our families. And we are like Lot who is vexed every day with the wickedness that he saw all around him.

Or we're in the wild wood. We want to go home. And God will eventually bring us there. But He will do it as He takes away the wicked.

When He separates the sheep from the goats. When He separates the wheat from the tares. And then peace.

And then home. And God promised to bless the nations through Abraham. And now, through this treaty and this covenant with Abimelech, Abraham is at peace with Abimelech and Abimelech is at peace with Abraham.

[27 : 37] And so there's no more outside danger. The Philistines are blessed through Abraham and Abraham is safe. And so, just take it all in again. Abraham has Isaac, the promised child.

He has peace in his family because God has put away the unbelieving. Abraham has peace and blessing from his kingly neighbor Abimelech.

And on top of all that, he has a tree and he has water and he's in the land of promise. God has kept all of his promises to Abraham.

And now, he's able to worship in peace. And he knows who to worship. He called on Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God.

The eternal God. God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness to his purposes and his plans. God's faithfulness. Sometimes it was despite Abraham's unbelief.

[28 : 42] Sometimes it was with Abraham's faith. Sometimes it was with Abraham's disobedience. And sometimes it was with Abraham's obedience. But it was God's faithfulness that brought Abraham here at last.

Now, why do we then need to hear the story? Why is the story here for us? Well, doesn't it encourage you to keep trusting in God?

Doesn't it encourage you to keep trusting in God? When God keeps all of his promises, we will have peace. We will be home. So, brothers and sisters, what has God promised to us?

What has he put in his word and said, this is your home. This is what I'm going to do. Listen to some passages from the last chapters of Revelation.

Revelation. And as I read, listen for echoes of Genesis 21. There's echoes here. And he said to me, this is God, it is done.

[29 : 45] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. That sounds a lot like the eternal God. on the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. And he who overcomes will inherit all of this. And I will be his God and he will be my son.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, their place.

This isn't their place. This heaven isn't their place. Their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. And then, I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

[31 : 03] On no day will the gates ever be shut for there's no night there. There's no gates to be shut because there's no enemies on the outside.

The nations are at peace. There's no danger and it's never night. The glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful.

And then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city on each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing twelve crops of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads.

The angel said to me the words are trustworthy and true. The Lord the God of the spirits of the prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things that soon must take place.

[32 : 25] So brothers and sisters home is coming soon. we will have our tree the tree of life. We will have our water the river of the water of life and we will have God's chosen son.

Not Isaac but the Lamb but Jesus and we will see His face and we will live with Him forever and ever.

Home is coming soon. God has promised it. So what is there for us to do? Keep believing? If this is promised then we need to keep believing.

Abraham persevered in faith and God brought him peace and home. And if that is your hope then what kind of lives should you live? What kind of life should you live?

How lightly you should handle and own the things of this earth. God has promised you a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

[33 : 35] And God has not been silent about that city has He? He but how can you believe? How can you believe in those promises and how can those promises be stronger and louder than the world's siren song and its ever pressing claims and chants for our attention and our heart.

How can God's promises be stronger and louder than the world if you aren't reading if you aren't meditating on God's promises?

Heaven is meant to be on the Christian's regular menu. It's to be on your regular menu. God never meant for you to live shut off and blind to that world.

Now He doesn't tell us everything we would like to know but He does tell us enough to know that that world is better than this and that world will last forever and this one won't.

So let's live for heaven then. Let's keep believing. But Revelation said something else very important. Revelation said He who overcomes will inherit all of this.

[34 : 58] Abraham had to overcome a lot to get to the place where he was and he's not God's not done with him yet. He had to overcome a lot. And so this is not passive believing.

This is faith triumphing over the world. This is faith triumphing over the world's lies. It's saying no to this world's luxury and to this world's life and saying this is what's worth living for.

This is dying to live. Read through Revelation. Dying in order to live. The indifferent will not make it. The half-hearted those who are sort of so-so I'm kind of into it. They're not going to make it. Those who overcome will inherit all of this.

But the cowardly are on the outside. God has promised heaven.

[36 : 04] Home is there. It's at the end of his promises. And so let's believe and in that faith overcome. Say no to this world.

Say no to its lies. Let's pray. Heavenly Father I do pray that you would please take the truth of heaven and home what you have promised us and make it real and powerful to us.

I pray that you would open our eyes so that we would not be confused or blinded by this world that wants to make this world home and this world where all life is at and owning and possessing and doing and being in this world.

Lord we have tried to find home here and it's not to be found. Thank you for calling us heavenward. Thank you for saying and showing us something far better than what this world can provide. And thank you that it comes as a promise. And all of your promises are yes and amen and Jesus Christ and so I pray that we would be going to him, living upon him and overcoming through him and through his strength that is at work in us.

[37 : 43] Lord thank you that we will all be there, all of your people will be there. I pray that those who are on the outside now, those who are half-hearted, those who are unbelieving, that you would call them to yourself, that you would wake them up, show them that there's no home here, there's no peace here, and for them there's certainly no peace afterwards.

There's no long sleep for them, but only fearful expectation of fire and your wrath. So I pray that you would wake them up to their danger, make them to see that they are in the city of destruction, and call them to yourself.

Save them for Jesus Christ's sake, and it's in his name I pray, amen.