

As you listened to the reading today did anything jump out at you?

Story – there is a famine: often spells trouble

Isaac told by God to stay and he would be blessed

Here is a man who was born with some of his father's character strengths and is a beneficiary of the blessing of God; but, he also inherited some of his father's weaknesses. We see him resisting the lure of Egypt and obeying God's command, but we also see him repeating the mistakes his father made in pretending his wife is his sister. (Gen 12:11-13; 20:1-2) As a result of this behaviour God punished Pharaoh and his household and told Abimelek he was as good as dead – despite the fact that they were innocent participants in the situation.

So, when he saw Isaac up to the same thing Abimelech must have been thinking 'here we go again'.

What struck me was in verses 12-13

Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy.

Where is the punishment?

Sin brings separation from God and, ultimately has to be dealt with – Jesus did that on the cross.

Romans 5:20-21 ²⁰⁻²¹ *All that passing laws against sin did was produce more lawbreakers. But sin didn't, and doesn't, have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. When it's sin versus grace, grace wins hands down. All sin can do is threaten us with death, and that's the end of it. Grace, because God is putting everything together again through the Messiah, invites us into life—a life that goes on and on and on, world without end.*

There are two amazing phrases in those verses:

Aggressive forgiveness – unusual phrase because aggressive is more commonly used in a negative way today. Reminds us of the battle

between spiritual powers and ands against the *gentle Jesus, meek and mild* image we so often have.

Invites us into life – for years people have imagined that Christians are joyless, boring, fuddy-duddies. That's how we end up with I M Jolly on tv – for generations ministers were trained to speak like that!

Grace is unmerited.

Isaac received the blessing in response to the promise of God in verse 3 – stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and I will bless you.

He had been partly obedient – he didn't go to Egypt to look for food, but he didn't trust God enough to know that God would protect him and Rebekah.

Ultimately the blessing that Isaac received brought him back to God.

Does that mean we can simply do whatever we want and expect that God will bless us anyway? Absolutely not!

Romans 6:1-2 *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*

What it does mean is that all of the promises God has spoken over your life will come to pass if they haven't already. So many people feel that they have failed God in some way and that there is no possibility of restoration; that it's too late; that whatever you have done will forever prevent you having a deeper relationship with God;

BUT, (drunk getting in your face) aggressive forgiveness – invited into life

I really wanted to talk about the wells, but we'll come to that another day, except to say this: These wells are deeply significant because

they are vital to sustain life. That's why Isaac's enemies filled them in – if he couldn't get water he would have to move on. They dug out wells that had been used by his father, and filled in by his enemies, but there was constant friction so they went to Beersheba and God appeared to Isaac with a renewed promise of blessing. They dug a new well there.

Sometimes, in desperation we try to use what we know and what has gone before – I think that is something we do in church in the West. Faced with steady decline we try to do the old things better.

But what we actually need is a reminder of God's promise of blessing and his amazing grace. We are called into life and I believe that includes the church as well as individuals. We have to find new wells, the places and things that provide life for us and for others.