

**Foundations: Isaac II--Following God's Way
Genesis 26:19-25 (AFBC 8/27/17-196th Anniv.)**

19 Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. 20 But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek ("dispute"), because they disputed with him. 21 Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah ("opposition"). 22 He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth ("room"), saying, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land."

23 From there he went up to Beersheba. 24 That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." 25 Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

None of us knows exactly what life was like for those folks who founded this church back in 1821. It's a safe assumption, though, that they faced hardships far beyond anything we've encountered.

As I studied this text, it occurred to me that the lives of those who started this church may well have been more like those of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob than like our lives today.

From this Scripture, we realize that life wasn't easy for Isaac and the others with him. They dug a lot of wells and dodged a lot of enemies—not so unlike the stories we hear about the early settlers in upstate South Carolina. It wasn't easy carving a home out of the wilderness, and not everyone wanted them here.

We've been considering the lives of the patriarchs of our faith. Those who founded this church may also qualify as patriarchs for us, but we're focusing on those we find in Holy Scripture.

We began with Abraham. We're now considering Isaac. Jacob and Joseph are still to follow.

Our theme last Sunday was "Finding God's Will." We looked at the incredible story of Abraham sending out his servant to find a wife

for his son, Isaac. Although we don't do it that way today, we discovered in those ancient words principles for discerning God's will--guidance that can still help us find God's plan for our lives.

Isaac encountered some tough situations. He was forced to move from place to place and dig new wells until, finally, he was allowed to settle down in a place that he named Rehoboth (i.e., Room!).

Chances are you don't know a lot about Isaac. We often hear God referred to as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but we're told far more about Abraham and Jacob than we are about Isaac.

We do know about that unusual approach that was taken to find him a wife—that was our text last week--and now the passage before us today. There're a few others, but they often focus more on someone else rather than Isaac himself.

By way of contrast, Abraham's story requires 13 chapters in Genesis. Jacob's story takes ten chapters. Still, Isaac's life is quite significant as the child of Abraham and Sarah's old age, and as the one who would continue the lineage of God's people, a lineage that would culminate in the birth of Jesus, the Christ.

Today, we share the Lord's Supper together. In doing so, we remember Christ's death. It's a meal of symbols, the bread representing our Lord's broken body, and the cup, His shed blood. The bread and cup are real--yet they point us to spiritual truths that are far more important than mere food and drink.

In the same way, I want us to consider three physical quantities mentioned in Isaac's story. These, too, can direct our thinking toward deeper spiritual realities.

We find all three of these in just one verse, **Genesis 26:25—**
"Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well."

1. First, ISAAC BUILT AN ALTAR. This was a time of great difficulty for Isaac. God had blessed him in the land of the Philistines where he was living. The Bible says (verse 13):

"(Isaac) began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of

servants. So the Philistines envied him."

These could have been good times, but Isaac was seen as an alien in the land. He didn't belong there, so the locals decided to take deportation into their own hands.

They filled in all of Isaac's wells; and their king, Abimelech, said to Isaac: **"Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."** So Isaac begins moving from place to place, encountering opposition and conflict everywhere he goes, until finally he comes to Beersheba.

None of this was easy. Times were hard. Isaac became a victim of his own success. All this moving about and settling down in new places and digging new wells was exhausting.

So when Isaac finally arrives at a place he can call home, God speaks to him: **"I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake." (v. 24)**

In response to God's promise, Isaac builds an altar. Now, if you recall, Isaac knows all about altars. This is the same man who as a young boy was carried up Mount Moriah by his father Abraham and was laid across, of all things, an altar of sacrifice.

The Lord was testing Abraham--would he be obedient? Would he be committed to the Lord even to the point of sacrificing his son? And the answer the Lord received was a resounding YES.

An altar speaks of commitment and the ultimate sacrifice. No one understood this better than Isaac and his father, Abraham. But by the providence of God, Isaac was still around to remember this event and to reflect on its significance.

It was two thousand years later that the Heavenly Father watched His own Son being nailed to an altar of ultimate sacrifice. We call that altar "the cross!"

For the rest of the world, it's a place of horrible execution. For us, though, it's the altar where our loving Heavenly Father allowed His own Son to be sacrificed as an atonement for our sin.

Today, in Baptist life, we have an "altar call"—perhaps under-utilized today. It's a time set aside in every service of worship for

us to publicly give our lives to Christ and renew our commitments to Him. I grew up singing the old Gospel song:

“Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Your heart, does the Spirit control? You can only be blest and have peace and sweet rest, As you yield him your body and soul.”

That’s still true, friends. When we hold something of ourselves back from the Lord, we forfeit His blessing of peace. When instead we stand before this altar, we’re saying, “Lord, my life is yours.”

When we place our tithes on the altar, we’re saying, “My heart is yours,” for as Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

When we ordain deacons, or commission Sunday School teachers or mission team members before this altar, those gathered here are testifying that they are giving their lives in service to God.

The apostle Paul pleads with us in **Romans 12:1**, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”**

Paul tells us that before we receive the Lord’s Supper, we should examine our lives. What are we holding back? What is there about us that has yet to be placed on the altar before God?

Christ Jesus placed His all on the altar for you and me. He expects us to place our all on the altar for Him. Have we? And are we now?

2. In Isaac’s story, there’s an altar, a symbol of commitment and sacrifice; and next, we find a TENT. There in Beersheba, our text says, **ISAAC “PITCHED A TENT...”**

Isaac heard the voice of the Lord in Beersheba. He met God there; and so he pitched his tent in this place where the Lord’s presence had been so powerful. Wherever God speaks to us, that’s where we should want to be!

Interesting thing, though, Isaac didn’t build a house. He pitched a tent. Now, that was pretty standard stuff in his day, and Isaac had been run out of town several times—so... a tent made good sense.

But for us, tents represent the most basic living arrangements we can imagine. Oh, we may choose to live in a tent for a few days—

we call it camping; or in the case of some natural disaster, there are tent cities that spring up to provide temporary shelter. But whatever the reason for it, living in a tent is pretty basic... and not usually... permanent.

The reason Isaac pitched his tent in Beersheba is because this was where God was speaking to him. God had brought him there; but if God's presence led him elsewhere, Isaac was ready to go.

This is not faith that's just tacked on as some small part of life. This is "faith... as a way of life." Isaac's "house" was not a fixed structure crammed full of possessions. He was "camping out" and ready to move his home to wherever God led him.

We stress over real estate, and the stock market, and whether there's an economic crisis around the corner. Who knows? We don't. And the experts don't know either.

But what if we were forced to cut back and just "cover the basics," as they say—would that be all bad? Don't you find it interesting how Jesus talked in such basic terms. "Give us this day our daily bread." That's not asking a lot—daily bread?!?

And when Jesus instituted this meal of remembrance, the Lord's Supper, He used some bread—perhaps a bit more than what we'll consume today, but not much more. And it was unleavened bread, so, unlike this Becky-bread, it wasn't very good!

Bread is basic. It travels well. We share the Lord's Supper together here, but I got to thinking: I've also shared it on youth camp outs, on mission trips in Vermont and Guatemala, and during a Furman Singers Concert Tour in Romania--when that nation was still behind the "iron curtain" of communism.

Faith in Christ is as basic to our souls as bread is to our bodies. And we can take bread with us anywhere we go—wherever God may lead. If faith is truly a way of life for us, then... that could be just about anywhere!

Isaac shared his father's faith-as-a-way-of-life perspective. He "built an altar... he pitched a tent... and..."

3. ISAAC DUG A WELL. You didn't live long in that part of the world unless you had access to water. So wherever Isaac went, he had his servants dig wells--lots of them!

Just as bread is necessary for life, so, too, is water. Isaac and his servants could either DIG or DIE! During times of drought, we become very aware of how dependent we are on water!

The Lord's Supper reminds us of how dependent we are on Christ and His sacrifice for us. As the bread symbolizes His broken body, the cup symbolizes His shed blood. We are totally dependent on His death for our lives.

Because of this, for 196 years, hymns like this have been sung by folks involved in this church's life and worship:

"Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God; all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood." (Isaac Watts)

Later, our church started singing some new, modern hymns like:

"What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." (Robert Lowry)

That hymn hadn't been written yet when this church started. And, yes, such Gospel songs were criticized by many as being too shallow and emotional—better suited for the tavern or dance hall.

What matters though—for us, just as it did for them—is whether faith a way of life for us—in every moment and in every place? Do we acknowledge and confess our complete dependency on Jesus Christ for our lives, our salvation, our eternity?

We're here today, friends, because so many others have gathered here before us. They faithfully built altars, pitched tents, and dug wells for God; but also, they did all of this for us.

As we prepare to receive this supper, may we examine our hearts, our convictions, our priorities, our faith. May we see with fresh eyes this altar, the bread and the cup, the body and blood of Christ Jesus—His all...on the altar...for us.

Then, let's take an honest look at our lives... and ask, "Are we willing to give what it takes, and make whatever sacrifices are needed, for those who will follow after us here?"

Are we placing our all on the altar for Christ?"