**Homeletical Script: [Them and Us]**

**Genesis 25:19-26**

 There’s are storms coming…can you feel the wind as it picks up? Can you see the clouds as they rush upon the boat? Are you ready for it? Ready for the boat to start rocking, the boards to creak and the containers to rattle? Do you know what to do? Good sailors know how to “hold fast” during the midst of the storm. They rush to their posts and lash themselves to the ship. Dutch sailors started the tradition of shouting “hold fast” to their fellow sailors during the midst of the storm, a command for each man to brace himself against the weight of the waves crashing over the sides of the boat, as he kept to his duties on the ship.

There are storms coming…and if we’re not prepared for them, we might just allow the ship to be blown off course. We might be the next headline about the hypocrisy of the church—and that’s not my desire for myself, or my prayer for you. My prayer is that like good sailors, we understand how to “hold fast” in the midst of the storms in our lives. And I think our text today gives us an excellent example of how to do just that—in a situation that is much like our own. As we explore the story of Isaac and Rebekah in the text of Genesis, we will learn from their example and discover how they were able to hold fast to God in the unfulfilled areas of their lives.

Our text this afternoon is Genesis 25:19-26, the birth narrative of Jacob and Esau. Turn with me to this passage in Genesis, the twenty-fifth chapter, verses 19 through 26. As we look at the text this afternoon, we are going to make a comparison. First, we are going to compare Isaac and Rebekah’s situation to our own. Then, we are going to compare Isaac and Rebekah’s response to our own. Finally, we are going to look at God’s response to Isaac and Rebekah in this story. So in total, we will look at 2 Situations: Theirs and ours. Then we’ll look at 3 Responses: Theirs, Ours, and God’s.

First let’s examine Isaac and Rebekah’s situation: A lot is happening in Chapter 25 of Genesis. When we arrive at verse 19 as the readers, we have just read the account of Abraham’s death and the blessings upon Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham is out of the picture in the minds of the readers—Isaac is on his own. Abraham has left all the family inheritance to Isaac and God has blessed Isaac too—so he’s quite wealthy now. Ishmael is blessed too—extremely blessed with twelve sons. Things are going extremely well as the narrator moves the focus of the story to Isaac and his family in verse 19. As readers, we begin to wonder, what will Isaac be like, now that he’s on his own?

Unfortunately, we find out that Isaac and Rebekah face a big problem in their lives in verse 21: they could not have children! We know from the previous story of Abraham and Sarah that the inability to have children was HUGE in this culture—and now we find Abraham’s son faced with the same dilemma as his father! Not only that, but we’ve just been told that Ishmael had 12 sons! It’s difficult enough to face tough circumstances, but it’s got to be ten times more frustrating to watch your brother be extremely blessed in the same area. The question that the narrator’s portrayal of the story begs us to ask is: “Will they deal with their problem the way that Abraham and Sarah dealt with it?” Finally, one more complication gets stacked upon all the others: After twenty years, when they are finally blessed to become pregnant, the pregnancy is difficult and uncharacteristic. The apparent answer to prayer looks like a curse, at first. Isaac and Rebekah are faced with a specific area of difficulty in their lives. As the narrative reveals to us toward the end, it’s an area that they had to deal with for twenty years. Unlike the story of Job, this isn’t a dramatic event where someone’s entire life falls apart—where they lose everything or face devastating circumstances. Their situation is more like our situation. Let’s look at how we are like them and how their life reflects our life:

Isaac and Rebekah were VERY blessed. They inherited the good things that Abraham had left them and they had the blessing of God. We in comparison, continue to live in one of the most prosperous and developed nations in the world. Regardless of how tight our budget may feel from month to month, we are experiencing privileges that people all over the world envy. We own cars, homes, and computers. We are receiving one of the best Theological educations available. We worry about what we will eat for dinner, not whether or not we will be able eat dinner. So like Isaac and Rebekah, we are VERY blessed. We have what we need in most areas of our lives.

Isaac and Rebekah were also on their own. Abraham’s leadership of the family was fading and his son was faced with maintaining a faith that had not been as filled with God encounters as his father’s. Rebekah in particular would be faced with the decision of whether to maintain the faith of her family from Aram or her husband. We face a similar situation. Each day we spend here moves us closer to graduation and a career in ministry. A time when we will no longer be students or children in the world’s eyes, but will rather find ourselves facing the question as the next generation of Christian leaders: Will we be carry on the legacy of past generations? Like Isaac and Rebekah, we will soon be on our own.

Isaac and Rebekah faced an obstacle that took a long time to overcome, that was an area of extreme blessing for Ishmael, and that got more complicated as it was resolved. We face similar challenges, as I mentioned before. We will probably not face a time when we loose everything—but there will be specific areas of our life where we will feel our faith challenged. As we enter ministry, we will have to react to feelings of jealousy as our peers find great success in areas that our ministry fails. We may have to labor for 20 years as Isaac and Rebekah did before we see God send a tangible answer to our prayers. And we will face times when the answer to our prayers turns into a new problem that we face with even more faith than the original problem.

Our prosperity reflects the prosperity of Isaac and Rebekah. Our life situation reflects their life situation. And our dilemmas reflect their dilemma.

How do we face these challenges? How can we carry on the legacy of faith left to us? That’s the answer that we find in Isaac and Rebekah’s response to their situation. We find two key things in their example in the narrative. First, they react differently than Abraham and Sarah. Instead of trying to manipulate their circumstances to speed up the process, they wait on God. They wait 20 years for God to give them tangible evidence that He’s going to continue His promise to Abraham to make Isaac’s descendants into a great nation. They submit to God’s agenda, rather than creating their own.

Secondly, they seek God in this area of hurt and confusion. Isaac prays for his wife. Rebekah seeks clarification of her condition in pregnancy. They not only wait patiently, but they communicate their pain and their confusion to the Lord. Rebekah is especially unique in this respect, seeking the God of her husband, rather than the gods of her family in Aram.

Their response should be our response. In these areas of difficulty, we must be submissive to God’s agenda as they were. We must be both patient and obedient. Patient…and obedient. Again, this is not a time for dramatic expressions of faith that charge the gates of the enemy, rather it is the steadfast core of faith which grounds us to what we have believed. Difficult circumstances are going to lure us away from the good life and the good ministry that our work, day in and day out, often causes us to minimize. We must learn to “hold fast” to what we know God has set before us to do--to cling to God’s revealed agenda for our lives with patient obedience. We must “hold fast” to our faith in these unfulfilled areas of our lives.

Furthermore, in these areas of difficulty, we must seek God with our hurt and confusion. Our God is personal…He walks through these circumstances WITH us. Unlike the sailors who held fast to a boat, we hold fast to a person, and that person listens to us. God does not have voicemail that He ignores or deletes. He does not tune us out…He listens. We are walking in faith when we ask God for the things we believe we need, as Isaac did. And we are walking in faith when we ask God to advise us when our blessing seems to be causing additional pain or confusion, as Rebekah did. We need both Patient Obedience, and Faith that Communicates. We need both Patient Obedience, and Faith that Communicates.

Finally, let’s not miss the beautiful conclusion of this narrative in God’s response. For although the problem of having children was difficult for Isaac and Rebekah, God answered Isaac’s prayer with a children, and He answered Rebekah’s worried inquiry about her pregnancy by declaring great things for the children who were causing pain in her womb. Their patient obedience honored God and their faith that communicated with God was answered in ways that comforted them and confirmed His promises to them. Again, the same is true for us. Our patient obedience honors God and our faith that communicates with God will be answered in ways that comfort us and confirm God’s promises to us as believers. Their ultimate experience and ours will confirm God’s sovereignty over our circumstances, and His goodness.

In conclusion, let’s remember that our situation was no different than theirs: specific areas of our lives test our faith. Let’s remember that our response should be like theirs: we must hold fast to God in these difficult areas of our lives through patient obedience and faith that communicates. And let’s remember that God’s response will ultimately comfort us and confirm His promises to us.

The storms are coming…some are already on the horizon, some are already upon us, beating against the sides of our lives, trying to knock us off course. Some will last for a few days, some for a few years. My prayer for you and for me, is that we hold fast to God during them, and honor Him above all else.

(Final Image, if there is time)

My faith pit is currently a house in Atlanta that has cost me over $35,000 since I left it to come to DTS two years ago, causing me to have to pick up a part-time job, travel to court in Georgia to evict a renter, and spent Reading Week making house repairs. It’s one area of my life that I have dragged with me through seminary, and that has threatened to derail my finances, my schoolwork, and my life here in Dallas, Texas. I’ve been advised many times to stop making payments on it in order to get the bank to agree to a short sale—the paperwork is already done and filed, but I have to be behind on the mortgage for it to be processed. Every month I send another payment on the mortgage—a constant reminder that another financial misfortune with the property could force me to stop school or even move back to Georgia to get my finances back in balance.

Will I have this faith pit for another two years as I finish school? Will I have it for another decade? I don’t know. What I do know is that patient obedience to God requires me to keep paying the mortgage that I agreed to until God brings along the right buyer for that property. I know that my faith continues to communicate my frustration with the house to God, as I cling to Him and His timing. And I know that God’s response to me as the owner of that home will ultimately provide both comfort and a confirmation of His promises to take care of me.