

Our Sense of Self Worth

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Okay, well, morning folks. It is lovely to see you. My name is Graham. I'm the pastor here of the church. Now, I get that it's hot, says the guy in the jumper, but this is really worth our best time and concentration today.

This is an incredible passage if we've got the eyes of faith to tune in and see what it's saying to us. So let me encourage you to come expectantly to Genesis chapter 26. You can grab a Bible round about you or your own, or you can scroll on your phone.

But so important that we have God's word open in front of us, Genesis chapter 26. And so with that in mind, let me try and get us into both the challenge and the comfort that God is going to hold out to us today in his word.

Now, here is British tennis player Emma Raducanu. Now, back in 2021, she became a household name when she won the US Open as an 18-year-old rookie.

And if you've followed her career since then, you'll know that she's kind of struggled both mentally and physically with the demands of the game of tennis. And so she said this in an interview with BBC Sport this week.

[1 : 19] If anybody read it, I thought it was a fascinating insight into the personality of a sports person. She said this. She said, I very much attach my self-worth to my achievements.

If I lost a match, I would be really down. I would have a day of mourning, literally staring at the wall. I feel things so passionately and intensely.

Now, on the one hand, part of me kind of loves that drive in her. But on the other hand, I may be saying this as a father, I really feel for her.

Because no 18-year-old, or she's now, what, 20, should live with that kind of outrageous burden and pressure on their lives, right?

Let alone in life, as opposed to the game of sport. Now, I take it, though, when she uses that phrase in yellow there, she says, It's my self-worth. I take it short for the thing that she perceives that gives her life meaning and purpose.

[2 : 32] Okay? It's kind of one of the buzz phrases of our day, our self-worth. And for her, that thing is winning. Which you have to say is fine when you're winning.

But what happens when you don't win? I've got a friend called Andy. In fact, Andy was preaching here a couple of weeks ago. Andy's the chaplain at Hearts Football Club down in Gorgate.

I remember hearing him say, not so long ago, that in his role as the chaplain of that football club, none of the boys want to talk about the big things in life when things are going well, right?

When things, when they're winning, when they're performing well, nobody's thinking about the existential questions of life. But all it takes is for the team to start losing, and for contracts to be up for discussion, and for injuries to set in, and all of a sudden the questions come flying out.

So let me ask you, with that in mind, where does this morning, where does your sense of self-worth come from? You see, here is the stunningly unique thing that the Christian faith has to say into our world today, that's the polar opposite of what you'll hear every single day as you live your life in this world, when it comes to the whole issue of identity and worth.

[3 : 55] The Christian faith, the Bible consistently says that in order to understand ourselves, we need to first begin by looking away from ourselves, and to the God who made us, and who created our hearts to be eternally satisfied in knowing him.

And so here is where, if you wondered where on earth we're going with this this morning, here is where Emma Raducanu connects with Genesis 26. See, the first readers of Genesis, and this is what we've got to understand, as Moses writes this book of Genesis, the first readers of this first book of the Bible are the generation who are wandering in the wilderness.

Right? The Israelites, the people who God has rescued from Egypt. Right? Remember that story, Let My People Go, that famous line? I was going to say that Will Smith made famous in The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, if you know that scene.

Yeah? Let My People Go. They're out of Egypt. They're now journeying towards the promised land, the land where God said he was taking them. So these guys are the first readers of Genesis.

Now that's critical for understanding the book as a whole, and it's crucial for understanding the message of chapter 26, because as that generation journey to where God has taken them, right, they have got all sorts of questions, spoken and unspoken in their minds.

[5 : 29] Who is the Lord? Is he good for his word? Can we trust him? Or actually, is he just a bogus salesman whose words aren't worth the bit of paper that they're written on?

How do we know that we're not staking all of it on an old wife's tale? Right? Always love it. Is atheist Richard Dawkins right?

Is Christianity just a fairy tale for those afraid of the dark? Always love how Christian professor John Lennox responded to that claim in a moment with a bit of love and a bit of humor when he said, actually, you think Christianity is a fairy tale for those afraid of the dark?

Can I just say, atheism is a fairy tale for those afraid of the light? It's what we do with the truth, isn't it? Like a beach ball, the Bible says, we suppress it. We hold it underneath. We don't really want to think about truth and the claims it has on our lives.

You see, they're wondering, asking, who are we? Where are we? Where are we going? And you understand that those are not just postmodern questions. Right?

[6 : 38] Human beings have been asking them ever since we were created. And this chapter is meant to give them, and it's meant to give us, a big piece of that puzzle. Kind of reminded me this week, if you remember that game show catchphrase.

Yeah? They always had that scene at the end where the big thing was you had to kind of guess the picture that was behind the puzzle pieces. And you just got that music, didn't you?

Do-do-do-do-do-do-do. Vump. And you saw a big piece of the puzzle reveal the picture.

Now, that's exactly what's going on in chapter 26. Have a look at the text with me, and this will become clear, I hope. You see, the bookends are the clue to the purpose of this chapter.

So, if you scan your eye in the text, over verses 3 and 5, and then again, you kind of get the repetition of it at verse 24, it's all about promises.

It's all about what God is promising to do and to be, for this man called Isaac. As God affirms the promises that he made to Isaac's father, Abraham, and as they get passed down this family line.

[7 : 56] There are four Ps, if you want to think about it like this. Four Ps underlined on the screen. They are promises of his presence. Okay? God is saying, that's what he says there.

That's the, I will be with you language. God is saying, my presence, and a people. That's the, I will multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven language, and a place.

I will give you these lands. Right? Isaac, as he hears this, I think is probably at the southwest corner of this bit of geography called Canaan, which is the promised land where God is leading his people, which as we'll see, is pointed to something far greater.

And, slightly stretching it a little bit, it's a program. Through your line will come one through whom I will bless the peoples of the world.

Now, what's strange here in terms of timeline, is that chapter 26 likely comes before chapter 25 chronologically.

[9 : 01] Okay? So, before these two boys, Esau and Jacob are on the scene. So, you kind of think about it like this. This is like when a character in a film has a flashback, to a key moment in the past, which kind of explains the present.

It's kind of what's going on here in this chapter. Because, in the present, do you remember what we saw last week? Are the last words of chapter 25. Look at it there.

The very last phrase. What did Esau do? He despised his birthright. Yeah? So, being the firstborn meant nothing to him.

This was a bit like when a bit of junk mail comes through your letterbox. You take one, look at it, scrumple it up, and throw it in the bin. This is how this guy reacted to the promises of God.

And it's almost as if Moses is saying, in this chapter, with that as the backdrop, do you see what Esau threw away?

[10:08] Do you see what he threw away? Do you see what he thwarted? Do you see what meant nothing to him? And I'm begging you, don't make the same mistake. Do you see how glorious these promises are?

How good God is for his words. Don't make the same mistake. And so, here's what I hope we see as we journey through this real quick as disciples of Jesus in terms of our identity and our worth. That who you are today, and who I am today, and who we are today, and who the church is today, is a community that is formed by, and fortified with, and standing to inherit the unchanging promises of God.

And it's my prayer today that we would leave, as we gaze at Jesus, we would leave here with zero doubt about God's ability to deliver on his promises.

And so, as we get there, and that's where we're going to kind of finish today, here's two lessons I think we learned from this chapter about the people who are journeying with faith.

[11:19] Here's the first one. Don't be frightened by what's around you. So, in the text, do you see how there's a famine facing Isaac?

Do you see that straight off the bat, chapter 26? And he thinks to himself, I'm going to do what my dad did, and I'm going to head to Egypt, because in Egypt, there's help, and there's food.

But God says, I want you to stay here. So, Isaac's got a choice to make at this point, doesn't he? Will he be obedient, or will he do the thing that he thinks makes sense to him? Will he live by faith, or will he live by sight?

Which is the question that faces every single generation of God's people, isn't it? Now, the cultural air which you and I breathe every day goes right against the grain of that.

[12:26] That if it feels right to you, then how on earth could your heart be wrong? And you spend enough time in God's words, and you learn that your heart is the last thing that you want to trust.

And actually, the person of faith says that God's word is the good compass by which I'm going to sail by. So, Isaac settles, do you see, in this place called Gerar.

But as he settles there, do you also see how he begins to lose his nerve? So, the men of Gerar inquire about Rebecca, his wife.

She was attractive in appearance, which I take it is Moses channeling his understated, polite Brit. She's drop-dead gorgeous. That's what we're meant to understand here.

And Isaac, when he gets wind of this, oh man, what a spineless fool he is. Yeah? And he's making the same mistake that Abraham, his father, made.

[13:34] Rather than standing by his wife and believing that the Lord will protect them both, what does he say? She's my, she's my sister.

Now, why, I can't get my head around that, why that would be the first thing coming into your mind to play that card. Yeah? If we were giving him the benefit of the doubt, now, I'll come on in a minute just to say that I don't, okay?

But if we were giving him the benefit of the doubt, knowing how the birds and the bees work, this could be him, because Rebecca is key to this whole offspring thing, yeah? This could be him trying to protect her and preserve her life.

But this is where I'm kind of landing. That he's pretty much a coward at this point. Abimelech says, verse 9, why did you do that?

And he says, lest I die because of her. Now, it's a half-truth, isn't it, that Isaac's kind of told?

[14:33] But in this moment, I think his heart, as it reacts, is revealed. And it's so often the case, this is what the Lord does, is we find ourselves reacting, not in the big things of life, but in all the little details that come our way.

He's revealing and he's prodding at and he's forming our character. Now, do you see this in your own heart? I see this all the time in mine. Right? The little half-truths that we tell, the little exaggerated stories, the little things that we think aren't actually that big a deal in God's eyes.

And to be honest, no one else kind of sees it. You know, kind of doing that rather than kind of, you know, doing what we tell the kids to just be honest, honest being the best policy.

Do you see that in your life? My heart instinctively wants to do an Isaac at certain points in time and just save my own skin. And those little times when we do that in our lives, I take it they're revealing something big about what's going on in our hearts.

What Jerry Bridges called respectable sins. Right? The little things that we do that we think no one else sees. They're not one of the headlines. They're just one of these little respectable things.

[15 : 55] We've got to remember that God sees that. I take it we need to recapture something of what the church leaders from the past called Coram Deo. Okay, how's your Latin this morning?

Okay, Coram meaning always. Deo meaning God. Always before God. So God sees everything that's going on in our lives.

There's nothing that's hidden from him. He is the all-knowing one. And we should live our lives every single detail knowing that we want to praise him with every single little detail.

Always living before the face of God. So why do we cop out? Right? Why is it when the person at your workplace and on the school run asks you what you did at the weekend?

There's part of you that's tempted just to kind of duck the question and ask about something else. Why is it that church leaders around the country so many of them are kind of fudging what the Bible says about sexuality?

[17 : 00] Why is that going on? The answer is because the fear of man is bigger in our minds and greater in our hearts than the fear of the Lord.

Now you've got to say what is the antidote to that? I take it it's just that we need to pray and humble ourselves and repent and seek a big view of God.

Now here's where I don't often do this in sermons but I'm going to do it here okay just pull someone out in a good way. Do you know what Jackson was telling me the other day? And friends the Lord teaches me so much through you in ways that you just will not be aware of but he does.

He said this he was talking about how one of the options that he looked at to getting back to Canada in the summer was the boat. I said Jackson how long is that going to take you?

Eight days. Eight days right? Waking up each day just looking at the sea. Waking up the next day just looking at the sea. I said why would you choose that over just not flying?

[18 : 10] And he said this phrase and it's just in my mind at the minute he said I just wanted to experience the distance. yeah I wanted to feel the the grandeur of the sea and how small I am in comparison to all of creation.

And we've been reminded this week haven't we that the Atlantic Ocean is a is a beast it's big and how much greater than the God who created all of the things that we see and that phrase has been pinging around my mind asleep like a ball in a pinball machine because it reveals that my my view of God is way too small and my fear of man is way too big.

You begin to read Isaiah and the prophets and that's the message to their generation. Why regard man in whose nostrils is breath?

The nations are but a drop in the bucket in comparison to him. And I take it to be increasingly growing in our understanding of the holiness and the grandeur and the magnificence of God as we immerse ourselves in the word of God is an incredibly healthy thing for our hearts to do.

And that's why Isaac has totally lost his nerve here. And that's the message to this generation.

Wandering, worrying about what's around them, tempted to conform to the idols and just be like everyone else around them.

[19 : 58] Moses is saying don't be frightened by what's around you. And secondly he's just saying don't be doubtful of what's ahead of you. Now verse 12, when we're told that Isaac sowed in the land, I take it that's just code for he started to walk by faith again.

Right? He started to do the thing that God had told him to do. And what a year this was if you caught that in the text. Imagine getting this family Christmas letter through the post.

How was the year gone? Well we had a bumper crop, our wealth increased, our flocks and our herds, their numbers went through the roof and because of that we had to hire a whole heap of servant workers.

Pretty good year for us. Right? No wonder the people in the land envy them as he puts that out on Instagram saying hashtag blessed. But I think that's what we need to see is exactly what's going on here.

Right? This is more than just Isaac has got the Midas touch. Do you remember what those four Ps, remember some of the blessings that God said he would give his people because of his promise to them?

[21 : 10] Right? People and lands. Do you see how the author is trying to tell us that God is beginning to make good on his promises?

So much so that verse 16 Abimelech says you need to leave, you need to get away because people are too envious of you because you're getting too big. right?

And again as we fast forward to the Exodus stories, exactly what you see is they begin to grow and multiply. What does Pharaoh say? No, we can't have this. Abimelech says you're too big and despite opposition that comes as a result of the wells that they dig, verse 22, do you see how the well that they finally settle at, what does he call it?

Rehoboth meaning the Lord has made room for us. In other words, the Lord has provided like he said he would.

Abimelech even says so, verse 28, we see that the Lord has been with you. So there's another P, do you see it? We see that God is with you, we see the presence P. So to see the message to this generation, you can put all your eggs in the God fulfilling his promises basket.

[22 : 37] No need to split your risk, no need to open different bank accounts just in case one of them goes under. No, no, no, you can put all of it, stake it all on God fulfilling his promises.

So don't mistake, don't make the same mistake that Esau made. Don't be scared of what's around you. Don't be doubtful of what's ahead of you.

And here's what I want us to see sitting where we do in 2023 at this point in salvation history.

I want us to understand that we've got so much more reason to trust that God will make good on his promises. promises. And the reason that we do is because of Jesus.

Because he came from this family tree. We've seen one baton pass from Abraham to Isaac. Way down this family line is going to come Jesus.

[23 : 46] Now do you see how God makes these promises? Who does he make them to? Let me just stretch us for just 5-10 minutes as we bring this to a close. He makes them to offspring.

Yeah? And the New Testament tells us that that offspring is singular. So there's one person that's going to inherit and make way for these things to come to pass, these covenant blessings.

Because God said to Abraham, walk before me and be blameless. Right? Only the person who is going to fully fulfill God's side of the covenant bargain is going to be the one who's going to inherit these four Ps.

Only Jesus walked before the Father and was blameless. Right? Only he lived the perfect life so as to inherit these blessings.

We couldn't do that. No chance we could do that. See, part of this covenant bargain that God made with Abraham and is being passed down is that there would be blessings for obedience and there would be curses for disobedience on man's part.

[25 : 06] But the wonderful thing about the story of Abraham is that God is so committed to getting his people the blessing that he says, I'm even going to take those curses on myself.

And that's what Jesus did as he dies on the cross. He is taking the curses that we deserved on himself. Do you know something I'd never seen before until this week?

Love this. Genesis chapter three. As sin enters the world, and as God says there's a curse now, you will feel the effects of sin.

What is one of the symbols of the curse in terms of the ground? It's thorns, isn't it? Thorns and thistles. Scottish people kind of don't talk about the thistles.

Thorns. And what do you see going on as Jesus goes to the cross? What is he wearing on his head? A crown of what?

[26 : 12] A crown of thorns. Do you understand that Jesus is taking the covenant curses that his people deserved on himself? That's what he does as he goes to the cross.

He hangs on a tree. So there's another sign of the covenant curses. He takes them in our place. And with that in mind, as you see here, Isaac the coward, when faced with the decision that it's either your bride's life or it's yours, and he says, I'm picking mine.

You cannot help but think of Jesus as he goes to the cross with his bride in mind. His bride being his people, and he's faced with the exact same question.

It's either your life or it's hers. It's either your life or it's your people's. Isaac made his call, and Jesus also makes his call, but he does the opposite of what Isaac does.

He says, it's me instead of her. And there, as he dies on the cross, he is uniting himself to the death penalty that every single one of us deserved.

[27 : 31] and in turn, we are united because of our faith to these blessings that only he deserves.

And that's why I love, we started with it today, that chorus that kind of captures the language of Ephesians 1. Ephesians 1 starts about how God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

He has what to us? He has chosen us He has redeemed us, He has justified us, and He has adopted us as His sons and daughters.

Not because of what we've done, but because of our covenant King who died on the cross for us and shares with us His life. And in Him, those four Ps are ours.

A people, Christians all over the world, today, do you know, just love the fact that there's a small number of us today, but how many different countries and how many different continents are represented?

[28 : 39] Maybe we can chat about that at the picnic. Global people that Jesus has gathered for Himself, His presence, it's one of the blessings that we have, is God's Spirit, not living over us, but living in us.

A place, God is leading us home to Himself. And that's why the Spirit living inside of us testifies with us that yes, that's true, sealed us with the Spirit, wonderfully true, partially now, but all of these things are going to be fully amplified in God's new creation, the place where He's taken us.

So who are we? Where are we? Where are we going? Come to think of it, who is the Lord? Well, here is my plea to us, dear brothers and sisters in the faith, is not to do an Esau, but to be firm in God's ability to deliver on His promises.

And by God's sheer grace, we have been scooped up and this is our story. Whatever is going on in your life today, here's what I want you to know as we bring this to a close, that right here, however you're feeling, whatever you're facing, whatever sin is weighing you down, dear brothers and sisters, let's come back to Jesus and remember that in Him, this is our self-worth.

Now, here's the thing, just as we close, just for one minute, to kind of bring us back to the centrality of where I think this is meant to lead this first generation. Put your hands up this morning if you turned on a light.

[30 : 31] This is going somewhere, trust me, okay? Yeah? I turned on a light this morning. Now, as far as I can see, there are two types of light switch in the world that I know of. You've got your classic on and off, you've also got your dimmer.

You can kind of phase in and phase out the light. And I think this passage, as Moses writes us, he's getting us to think about both of those lights. Okay? First of all, as he asks us to examine our hearts and see where we're at, first of all, think about the on and off switch.

When it comes to your faith in Jesus, are you on or you off? Are you in or you out? Are you trusting in the promises of God or not?

And I think about the dimmer. See, the thing about the dimmer is it can be on, but it can be really, really low. And I think the challenge that comes to us that are on is as it concerns both our obedience to and our confidence in God's promises and having seen how committed he is to bringing them to completion in Christ is that when it comes to the dimmer of light of our faith, the challenge here is to turn it up.

Turn it up. Okay, whatever that looks like in your life just now, in terms of your witness at work, turn it up. In terms of maybe your church attendance, you know, I pray that for many of us, the Lord would be at work in our life, that church would stop being something that we go to and you would come to the centre and realise that it's something that we are part of.

[32 : 21] Yeah? Turning it up. You know, the way that we raise our children, turning it up as we thought about it today, whatever this looks like in our lives, I think the challenge of this passage is to turn it up.

Turn it up. I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he has made known, nor why unworthy Christ in love redeem me for his own, but I know whom I have believed, and I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

Let's pray, will we? And so, Father, it's our prayer this morning, that by your grace that you would just increase our appetite for and our assurance of what you have won for us in the person of your son, Jesus.

Lord, thank you that there is just simply no one like him. Father, who else would die for his enemies? God, you have to be with us.

And so, Father, as we contemplate your outrageous, unmerited love for us that's seen there, oh, Father, would you, by your spirit, increase our desire for not just the blessings, blessings, but our desire and our hunger and our affection for you.

[34 : 06] So, Father, be with us as we continue on this morning. I thank you for my friends here. I thank you for the role which we have in each other's lives. And Lord, may we together spur one

another on towards love and good deeds.
And in Jesus' strong name we pray. Amen. Amen.