

The Testimony of Life by Resurrection

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Reading: Gen. 26:18-22,32,33.

In those eternal counsels of God from eternity to eternity His Son our Lord Jesus stands over all His ways. In the light of His Son God has written this whole Book, and has therefore produced throughout the Book those features of His Son, foreshadowing, forecasting, typifying. And in that Divine arrangement of foreshadowing, we know Isaac has a very real and a very important and significant place as bringing into view one particular feature of our Lord. Isaac represents the testimony of life by resurrection. His whole life is characterized by that reality.

A Life of Absolute Self-Surrender

On the one side, the way by which that testimony of life and resurrection is produced is brought about in a life of absolute self-surrender and self-emptying. Isaac suffered much at the lips of Ishmael who we are told mocked him day in and day out. For the youth it was a life of continuous self-emptying, self-surrender, refusal to take up his own case and his own cause and vindicate himself. Then the great crisis in his life when he was called upon to set forth in figure and type the self-surrender of our Lord even unto death, when he yielded to the will of God in relation to the altar, and here in later life we find that same spirit, redigging the wells which his father had digged and named, and the Philistines had filled up, digging a well and contention arising over it, and not fighting it, not fighting to retain it, to keep it; moving on, digging another, and again enmity breaking out, not striving for his own rights, his rights in labour, his rights in the fruit of his toil, leaving it and going on again, leaving the issue with God and proving in the long run that God steps in. In the next two instances there is no fight at all. The Lord has stepped in; he attributes this to the Lord. Thus we see this man marked by this spirit of Christ. In complete self-emptying, self-surrender, yielding wholly to the will of God in very trying circumstances, in conditions full of provocation, annoyance and irritation, nevertheless this quiet, confident faith in God that in the end He will vindicate. Is not that a true picture of our Lord Jesus? And that is basic to the testimony of life in the power of resurrection. So it has proved pre-eminently, transcendentally, in the case of the Lord Jesus, a testimony of life, the power of resurrection. That is what Isaac stands for and embodies. He seems to stand for nothing else. We have to sum up his life in that. Here is a man whose very existence on the earth is a testimony to resurrection life, and then the key to that testimony is this quiet, confident faith that never raises a hand for its own vindication.

The Way to Enlargement

What a lesson! How much we need to learn that lesson, have it wrought in us. The turning-point did come. It was a long testing period of adversity, suffering, trial and annoyance, but the turning-point came and it came at Rehoboth. Up to that time it seemed as though Isaac's life was under a considerable amount of restraint and limitation. It looked almost like defeat. But his quiet, confident faith in God shown by this refusal to fight for himself brought God in at last, and the turning-point came. Rehoboth means the Lord has made room. Rehoboth means enlargement. You see the way of enlargement of life, the way of the testimony vindicated, established. That is the way to enlargement. The way to enlargement is so often the way of yieldedness, of patient endurance, of quiet confidence in the Lord, and it seems an almost endless thing. It sometimes looks as though we are losing more than we are gaining. There is that well and that well and that well. We laboured and suffered and lost, it seems. We gained nothing, had just to go on labouring, go on trusting the Lord and seeing very little for it, but the turning-point comes. We arrive at Rehoboth, and that is God's act and not

Isaac's. Immediately Isaac recognized the significance of this, at last even the enemy has had to accept the situation and stand back. Forces arrayed against him had to acknowledge — God is in this. You notice the setting of the story. Abimelech came to Isaac twice in recognition that the Lord was with him. That was challenged even by Abimelech's own servants; the people of the country in which Isaac was sojourning challenged for some time, but at last the enemy had to say, 'The Lord is with you, we had better leave you alone. It is no use going on like this; God is with you'. That is what it amounts to. The Lord stepped in, and Isaac said, 'Jehovah hath enlarged, made room.' There is a point at which the Lord does step in after a long testing of faith, a time when all those who have opposed have to say, 'Well, we must accept the fact that the Lord is with you.'

The Lord's Work

If Isaac represents the Lord Jesus and his life-work is just a figure or type of the purpose of the Lord Jesus, then the Lord's work is in the first place the recovery of the testimony of life. It sprang into being in the life of Abraham. He was the first to dig these wells and to name them, and then the enemy reacted and filled them all in. Isaac in the power of this new resurrection life recovered that testimony, and that is the first thing that he would do. When the mighty well opened on the day of Pentecost, the risen Lord went from place to place opening up wells. But they have been grievously filled in, that which was once living is now, shall we say, dead, smothered, covered over. It may still be there. The Lord would have a work, a ministry, through His servants of recovering the testimony of life everywhere. That is the Lord's work. And not only to recover, but to move on and make new life points in every place. It sounds very simple, but it is not so simple as that, as Isaac will tell you, but nevertheless this is the work of the Lord, to just make life points or to be life points everywhere.

What is the work of the Lord? You think of working for the Lord. What do you mean by being in the Lord's work? What are you thinking about when you think of working for Christ, going into the Lord's work, or however you may put it? Are you thinking about taking your Bible and giving Bible addresses, and many other forms of work like that, preaching and so on? Well, remember, dear friends, the real work, which, of course, may be by those means, along those lines, is not the real work. The real work is that wherever you are or we are there is a life point created, there is a well opened up, that it can be said, We have found living water! That is the work of the Lord.

The Lord's Work Through His Servants

And notice that it was through Isaac's servants. I think there is possibly a question as to whether Isaac himself ever put his hand to a spade. Isaac may never have dug one shovelful out of those filled-up wells, but he was working. His life-work and purpose was being fulfilled through his servants. Of course, the Lord Jesus is in His own way working at this, but really He is fulfilling His work through His servants. They came to Isaac and said, 'We have digged, we have found water.' But this was only the fulfilment of his own very existence, and we are fulfilling Christ's very existence when we, by His enablement and inspiration, bring into being these life points. It must be like that. Wells everywhere, wells of water. But it has got to begin with us individually. The Lord makes that a personal matter, does He not, in the Gospel that the individual who believes shall have a well of water springing up within unto eternal life (John 4:14), and who believes shall have a river of living water flowing from within (John 7:38). We have got to be that before we can do that. It is no use trying to create life points in places if we are not a life point ourselves. We must be the testimony of resurrection life ourselves, and get half a dozen or two or three such people in any place, and you will have a well of life for the whole area.

The Conflict

And finally there is a good deal of conflict always raging round this matter. These servants, these herdsmen of Gerar, seem to have pursued the servants of Isaac from well to well, challenged and disputed, made conflict over the whole thing, and it will always be like that. It is not going to be just an easy thing. For a long time it will be a disputing of the ground, a challenge to the testimony, a seeking to take it away. Remember that. Of course, you do not need to be told that, but just to be reminded that if you are a life point or a part of a life point wherever it may be, in this country or India, or any other place, there is bound to be conflict about it. But remember through the testing of patience and faith, through the conflict and the battle, there comes a point where Rehoboth is the name. The Lord has stepped in and from the straitness there is enlargement, and from Rehoboth he went to Beersheba.

What is Beersheba? Well, you see, that takes you right back to the original intention of God. If you look at the history of Beersheba it was that contention which rose with Abimelech and Abraham and a covenant was made, and Abraham brought the lambs of a covenant, the lambs of an oath, and had it settled in all the virtue of precious blood and the altar. Beersheba was established, so to speak, long, long ago in the blood of the lamb. It is the original thought of God, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, God's end secured, and at last we come to what was eternally intended by God: Beersheba, the well of the oath, the well of the covenant. At last we arrive where God always did intend we should arrive; we just come to His intention from all eternity. But what a way, a way of testing, a way of conflict.

But the point is, dear friends, that there is to be a testimony in life here and there and there, wherever we are found. I found this: "Every Christian gathering ought to be a community of the resurrection, and every Lord's Day an Easter Festival." That is good. May that be true where we are at the disposal of the Lord.