

Our Way vs. God's Way

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[0 : 00] And I'd like you, in your copy of the Scriptures, to open up to Genesis chapter 16.

! If you are using one of our church Bibles that are scattered around in the chairs, you can simply turn to page 11. It's really close to the front end of your Bibles there. Turn to page 11 in your Bible and you'll find Genesis 16 right there, if you're using one of the Bibles that we've scattered around. Otherwise, find Genesis 16 in your own copy of the Scriptures. I'm thankful this morning for Leslie stepping in, for Justin. Justin will be back with us next week. And he's been busy, busy this month. Some of you don't realize this, but actually Leslie led worship at Church of the Cross before Justin ever did. Because when I first met Justin, it was when we were in between worship leaders. We didn't have a worship leader. And I found his name as I was frantically searching the Internet for anyone to come and lead worship that week. And I found his name on a list of people who could supply, step in and substitute for you.

[1 : 13] And so I called him up. And in fact, he was not available or wouldn't be available because he was working in a church. But he was nice enough after we talked on the phone to meet with me for lunch. And he said, I'll tell you what, I'll help you out.

I'll find you some people until you're able to find somebody. I'll do my best to help you out and send different people to you each week until you find somebody more permanent. And a couple of weeks later, one of the people that he sent was Leslie.

And so she actually led for us before he ever did. And we're grateful to have them and their ministry with us. Now, if you found your place in Genesis chapter 16, I want to ask you guys to stand back to your feet, even though you just sat down.

And we will read through this whole chapter this morning, which is not long at all. Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.

And Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

[2 : 17] So after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband, as a wife.

And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, May the wrong done to me be on you.

I gave my servant to your embrace. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me. But Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your servant is in your power.

Do to her as you please. Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

And he said, Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going? She said, I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai. The angel of the Lord said to her, Return to your mistress and submit to her.

[3 : 20] The angel of the Lord also said to her, I will surely multiply your offspring, so that they cannot be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said to her, Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.

You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.

So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You are a God of seeing. For she said, Truly here I have seen him who looks after me. Therefore the well was called Berlahairoi, it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Father, we give you thanks for your word, and we thank you for recording these events from the life of Abram, so that we might be taught and instructed, and so that we might be caused to depend more fully and trust more fully upon you.

[4 : 27] We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Most of us are not very good at waiting. I know I'm not very good at waiting oftentimes.

I don't do well in long lines sometimes. I don't do well when the internet is running slowly. I'm not really great at waiting. In fact, sometimes I'm even shocked by my own impatience.

I was just the other day complaining at my phone, because it was taking too long for it to do the search that I'd put into my phone, when I thought, why am I complaining? I mean, it's having to receive a signal from a tower miles away, which is receiving a signal from a satellite up in space, which is receiving a signal from some other tower, from some computer somewhere, who knows where.

So why am I complaining about the slow rate of speed of something that I ought to see as miraculous, that I can even pull this information up? But the reality is that we are so accustomed to things happening at a faster pace and more quickly for us, that most of us just stink at waiting. We stink at being patient. But when we turn to the Bible, what we find is that we are not the only ones, that our culture or that our generation is not the only generation to struggle with waiting patiently.

[5 : 41] Now, as we'll see, of course, there has been great patience in the life of Abram and Sarai, but eventually that patience runs out. It runs short and it runs out before it ought to.

Though they had more patience oftentimes than we do, their patience and their willingness to wait on the Lord to fulfill His own promises in His own time is lacking. In fact, I want you to take a look here at the first verse of verse 16 and you get a sense of what's happening here.

You're reminded of the things that have been promised to Abram and how long they've been waiting. We're told now, Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

That's a call back to the first time that Sarai was even mentioned in the book of Genesis at the very end of chapter 11 where we're first introduced to Abram and we're introduced to his wife Sarai.

And the one thing that we are told about her at that time is that she was barren, that she was not able to have children. She had not been able thus far in their marriage and she's not able at this point.

[6 : 44] Now, at the point in time when God came to Abram and said, I'm going to give you offspring, I'm going to give you descendants, and I'm going to multiply them. At that point in time, when God sent him out from his family and toward the promised land, Abram was then 75 years old.

And now we are 10 years removed from those days. Abram is now 85 years old. Sarai is now in her 70s.

And her conclusion is, it's not going to happen through me. God has promised my husband offspring. God has promised that he will have numerous descendants.

But it's not apparently going to happen through me because we are 10 years removed. I am 10 years older. And most likely at this point in time, Sarai is entering into the stage, perhaps in the midst of the stage, of menopause.

So that she realizes and looks at herself and says, I can't bear children. It's too late for me. We're going to have to find another way. Notice what she says in verse 2. Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children.

[7 : 58] There was probably some hope in her up to this point. Now we think, hope? Why would she have hope up to this point? I mean, she's not young. She's now in her mid-70s. That seems a bit strange for her to have hope all the way up to this point.

Wouldn't she have lost hope much earlier on? Wouldn't she have been hopeless at the outset of the promise since she was in her 60s at that point in time? Why would she have ever had hope? If she was hoping that things would happen through the normal course of natural events, then why did she

ever have any hope?

But then you have to remind yourself that the patriarchs, the time of this period of time, at this period of time, people lived longer than they do now. That's recorded for us throughout Scripture. Now they don't live as long as people lived prior to the flood. They're not living to be 800 years old or 900 years old. But they are living much longer than we typically expect people to live now. Abram, for instance, would live to be 160. Sarai would die at 127 years of age. And if you do the math, if you figure today, most women die somewhere between the ages of 80 and 90, and you do the math, Sarai would be the equivalent in terms of physical age, if that's how it worked, we don't really know.

[9 : 10] But she would, if you do the math, she would be the equivalent somewhere between her late 40s to her mid-50s. And so it makes sense that at this point in time, 10 years removed, perhaps she was in her late 30s to early 40s when the promise was originally given, but now 10 years removed from that, she's just being practical.

And she's saying to Abram, her husband, the Lord has not allowed me to bear children and now it's too late for me. I'm no longer physically capable of doing that.

Now this is not a theological mistake that she's making. I don't believe. Because she recognizes, even in the way that she words that, the Lord has prevented me. She recognizes that God is sovereign in these things.

She recognizes that God, had He wished, would have been able prior to this to grant her children. She knows that He is sovereign in these choices. She knows that though things have a natural pattern to them, God rules even over those natural patterns.

He has established them. He holds them in place. And had He desired to give her children up to this point, she would have had a child. And so she acknowledges God's sovereignty in the situation. She's not completely thrown her hands in the air as if to say, well, God has lost control of things and He doesn't know what He's doing.

[10 : 30] She's simply being practical. She's acknowledging reality that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. And now she's at the point in life where, at least by all normal expectations, that's simply not going to happen.

It's just not happening for her. Now we would step back and say, but Sarai, shouldn't you just trust that the Lord is going to overcome your infertility and even overcome your age?

Well, perhaps she should have. But she's reacting, I believe, in the way that most of us would react. It's ten years later. That's a long time to wait.

And she doesn't know it yet, but she's not even halfway through with her waiting for the Lord to finally bring a child into the world through her womb. She's not even halfway there.

But at this point in time, as she looks at the circumstances and she grows exasperated with having waited already, her patience runs out.

[11 : 31] And rather than doing what we probably think she ought to have done, because we've read the rest of the story, rather than waiting for the Lord to do something miraculous, rather than waiting for the Lord to fulfill His promises in great detail, she decides to come up with another way of accomplishing this.

If you have said that my husband will have many descendants, then I will find another way. I will find another means by which your promise can be fulfilled because you're not doing it in the way that I thought that you would.

And we are often guilty of that same kind of thought process. We know God's promises in His Word. We know that He is true to His promises, and yet because we can't see how He's going to do that within our own life circumstances, we began to sort of plot and plan and try to find a way for God's promises to be realized in a way that makes sense to us because we grow tired and weary of waiting oftentimes on Him to fulfill His promises.

We grow tired of waiting for Him to set us free from some particular sin and some particular temptation. And so we either decide, I'm just going to give myself up to it, or we decide to come up with some crazy concocted scheme to keep us, and we jump through all of these hoops.

We grow tired of waiting. Or it may be simply that you've grown tired of waiting to give you better physical health, and so you begin to do things and experiment with things and try things with your health that are not a good thing to do.

[13 : 01] We're the same way. We know God's promises. We understand that He ultimately will fulfill them, but when He's not fulfilling them on our timeline, we begin sometimes to try to come up

with our own ways, our own means by which we might force the fulfillment of the promises simply because we're tired of waiting.

And the plan that Sarai comes up with is not for the time period in which they were living, is not an insane plan. Now, it sounds crazy to us. We think, what is she thinking?

What's wrong with this woman? We think that as we read through and we see what she does, but in her time period, this would have been perfectly normal. Take a look at exactly what she says. Look at the plan that she proposes.

Behold now, this is verse 2, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her.

Now, that seems a strange thing. Even the way that she words that, it may be that I will obtain children by her or through her. But this was the custom of that day and age.

[14:10] Most women of any means, and Sarai by this time is certainly a woman of means. Abram is certainly wealthy by this time. And any woman of means at that time would have a servant at her disposal, would have a sort of a handmaid.

And these servants, these handmaids, were not on the same level as a common slave. A common slave could be bought and sold and traded and all sorts of things. And they could be treated far more harshly than a person who occupied this position.

Of a handmaiden. Of someone who was there specifically to serve her female master, the lady of the house. They had more privileges than a regular slave.

They couldn't simply be sold away so easily. They couldn't do that to them. They couldn't simply be treated the way that any slave could be treated. So it was, while it was a place of servitude, among the servants, it was a place of honor.

And it was not uncommon for women who were unable to bear children to have their maidservants bear children and those children be counted as their own.

[15:20] To have their maidservants, in a sense, married off to their husbands so that he takes another wife and the first child that that woman has would typically be reckoned, be counted, be considered as the child of the wife.

Sometimes all of the children of a maidservant following would be considered the children of the wife, of the first wife. Sometimes just the first. But nevertheless, it was a way for a woman who hadn't been able to bear children to receive children that she could then claim as her own children. It was perfectly acceptable in the culture of that time and perfectly normal for them. Now, of course, it involved a layer, it involved the level of sin, which we'll talk about in a moment, but setting aside the sinfulness of it, at least in that culture, we have to recognize that it was considered a normal way for women who couldn't have children to obtain children.

It would have been on the level of normalcy that we have for procedures that they couldn't have even dreamed of, like in vitro fertilization or surrogate mothers. It would have been on the level of normalcy for that.

It's not the way that children were born to most women, but if it was necessary, it was another means that they could pursue. It wasn't odd. It wasn't strange.

[16:38] Abram wouldn't have been shocked by her proposal in any way. But as I said, the problem with it is not whether it's normal or unusual. The problem with it is that it involves sin.

Specifically, it requires Abram to sin against God's pattern for marriage. And if you wonder whether or not that is in the mind of Moses as he is recording this story, I think Moses gives us some clear hints that Abram is doing very much the same thing that Adam did.

Adam's failure in the garden began before he ate of the fruit. Adam's failure in the garden began because he failed to protect his wife from the tempter.

He failed to steer his wife and be a faithful, godly leader in that moment and keep her away from falling into sin. Because when you read the account in Genesis 3, what you realize is that the entire time that the serpent is tempting Eve and as Eve takes the fruit initially to eat of it, we're given this little brief note at the end of that part of the story and we're simply told and her husband was with her.

He was with her. He was beside her and yet he never speaks up. He in fact, rather than leading her, he is led by her into sin. That's exactly what happened in the garden.

[17:59] The roles that God had set up for husband and wife and within this one flesh union were violated by them. Adam was not a faithful, good leader in that moment so his wife fell into sin and

he followed her into it.

And that's what Abram does now. In fact, the language of Genesis 3 is reflected here in chapter 16. Let me show you what I mean.

Take a look again at what happens as Abram responds to Sarai's plan. His response should have been, no, that would be wrong, but that's not his response.

Look at the end of verse 2. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. Now that listening is not simply taking account of her counsel and hearing wise words from her.

No. This kind of listening is a following, almost an obedient type of listening. Doing what she suggests simply because she suggests it.

[19 : 05] And then if you move down to verse 3, so after Abram had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan, take note, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband, as a wife.

Now mark those words, took and gave, because we're going to find those in Genesis 3 as well. So there are two ways in which I think Moses, who's writing this, signals us to make a connection back to Genesis chapter 3.

That is Abram listening to his wife and the taking and giving of Hagar. Let me show it to you in chapter 3. Turn back just a few pages in your Bible because I want you to see this for yourself.

First of all, when God comes into the Garden of Eden to hold Adam accountable for what he has done, God questions Adam and then Adam responds and finally God responds back to Adam in verse 17.

And to Adam, he said, this is the Lord speaking, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

[20 : 09] Cursed is the ground because of you. Because you listen to the voice of your wife, Adam, and again, that doesn't mean literal listening in terms of receiving her counsel and receiving her advice.

Every husband ought to listen to his wife in that sense. There are many times when our wives will be able to steer us away from a mistake that we might make. There will be many times when the Lord grants them a wisdom that He hasn't granted to us.

The point here is not that we should shut our ears every time our wife begins to speak because she's not the leader. No, the point here is that Adam is listening in a subservient way. He's not stepping up and saying, whoa, stop, hold on, that's not right, we're not going to do that, do not take of that.

He's not standing up for her, he's just going along with it. He listened to her voice and the exact same language is present in chapter 16. Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

His fault is the same. He is failing to fulfill the role that God has given him as a husband to Sarai. And as a result of that, he follows her into sin.

[21 : 19] Notice the language again of take and give. Look up at verse 6 in Genesis chapter 3. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took, that's the exact same verb, she took of its fruit and ate, and here it is, and she also gave some to her husband, the exact same verb, who was with her, and he ate.

She takes and she gives. Sarai takes Hagar and gives Hagar to Abram. The sin and the folly here is a violation of the ways in which God has set up marriage.

But I would suggest to you that this violation actually began before this moment. I believe that it began as soon as Sarai began to doubt that God was going to bring a descendant for Abram into the world through her.

I would suggest that that's where the sticking to the biblical pattern began to fail. Because in chapter 15 as we saw last week in this great covenant that God makes with Abram, He tells Abram that out of your, literally He says, out of your belly will come a descendant, an offspring.

But at this point in time, Abram and Sarai are one flesh. That sounds like a very strange way to word things. out of your belly? Why would He say that to Abram, the husband?

[22 : 54] It seems almost senseless to us. But when you consider that passage, that chapter, in the light of the events of Genesis chapter 2 where God gives Eve to Adam and He says that they are now one flesh, it begins to make perfect sense.

When God told Abram that from your belly a descendant and offspring will come, He was essentially saying to him, through your wife, through the one with whom you have been made one flesh, that is through her, miraculous as it may begin to seem as the years tick by, through her you will receive a seed, an offspring, which reminds us again of the original promise after the fall in the Garden of Eden when God said that He would send an offspring or a seed into the world through the woman.

this promise is continuing on and it is meant to continue on through Sarai and yet there is a failure. There is a failure to understand that the promise to Abram is also a promise to Sarai because they are one flesh.

So there is already a beginning to distance themselves and question God's original plan for the marriage covenant and that is compounded as she follows the pattern of Eve and he follows the pattern of Adam and he fails to lead and she instead leads him into sin and indeed hands, takes, and gives Hagar to Abram.

This is the folly. This is the sin of it all. We are shocked by her proposal but no one would have been shocked by her proposal in this world.

[24 : 35] What Abram should have been shocked by as well as us is the shattering and fracturing of the biblical pattern that God has set up for man and woman in Genesis chapter 2.

In fact, that's something that we see happen throughout the Bible. Especially throughout the Old Testament. Often times we read through the Old Testament and we find ourselves greatly confused because we find great men of God throughout the Scriptures who have multiple wives.

King David had multiple wives. Solomon, the wisest man to ever live until Jesus set foot upon the face of the earth. Solomon had many, many wives and yet these are men who are extolled for their wisdom.

David extolled because he's a man after God's own heart and so we're often confused by that. Why, God, do you allow them to have multiple wives when it's clear in the New Testament and even Jesus Himself cites Genesis in saying that it should be one man and one woman who become one flesh?

Why did you allow that? Why is this happening? But if you pay closer attention to the biblical narrative as it unfolds, you will find that every time a man adds a wife to his first wife, there is trouble.

[25 : 49] Every time that happens, there are consequences, there are repercussions that reverberate throughout the generations so that David takes Bathsheba to be his wife and what happens because of that?

Not only does his child die and that's more of a consequence for the murder of her first husband, but also after that, there is a great turmoil in David's household over how Solomon will become king after David is gone and even aside from that, David had already taken upon himself otherwise. And what happens in David's family? You have the children of one mother pitted against the children of another mother and they're actually killing and murdering one another because there are power plays at work there.

every time this happens, every time the biblical pattern for marriage is broken in the Old Testament, there are dire consequences to follow. And we find that to be the case here in Genesis chapter 16. Sarai, of course, does not get what she wanted. Now, Hagar conceives and she bears a son and all things seem to be going according to plan initially, but as we see, as we read through the story, very quickly things take a turn against her.

[27 : 10] Her plan does not work the way that she thought it would. Look down in verse 5, or I'm sorry, verse 4. He went into Hagar and she conceived and, now this is about Hagar, when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

Hagar becomes pregnant and she begins to look down upon Sarah. That is, the point here is that she begins to treat Sarah as if Sarah is her inferior.

As if now Hagar, because Hagar is the one who's going to bear a child for Abram, as if Hagar is now the mistress of the household and Sarai is the servant in the household. She begins to treat her like that and that too was not an uncommon event in these kinds of arrangements.

In fact, I want you to hold your place in Genesis and I want you to turn all the way to the book of Proverbs. Near the end of Proverbs, chapter 30, we can see that this sort of thing was common because here, as Adger gives us some Proverbs, some wise sayings and some warnings, he warns us against this very sort of situation.

In verse 21 of chapter 30 in Proverbs, we read this, Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up and then he begins to list these things. In other words, he's saying, here are some things with terrible consequences.

[28 : 32] Here are some very bad things that cause problems among us. Look down in verse 23. First, he mentions one, an unloved woman when she gets a husband, but then notice the next one that he mentions, a maid servant when she displaces her mistress.

It was common enough that the book of Proverbs contains a warning about it. This is a bad thing when a maid servant begins to replace her mistress and take upon herself the role of the mistress. This leads to all kinds of bad things. The earth trembles at this. This is a frightening thing to begin to happen in a household. Proverbs is warning us. Unfortunately, Sarai did not have access to the book of Proverbs.

It hadn't been written yet. But she feels the effects nevertheless. Hagar begins to look upon her as if she is in the place of the servant and Hagar is now in the place of the wife.

And so rightfully, Sarai goes to Abram with her complaint. Rightfully, she comes to him to say, you've done me wrong because these things couldn't have happened had Abram not responded in some sort of negative way.

[29 : 38] Now the point of this chapter is not to highlight Abram's failure. That's clear. But the point of this story is to highlight the consequences of everyone's failure. But we know from Sarai's response that Abram must have been in some sense, maybe inadvertently, but in some sense complicit in Hagar's new attitude.

Something he was doing was allowing this to take place. Verse 5, Sarai says to Abram, May the wrong done to me be on you. I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt.

In other words, she holds Abram responsible for this breakdown in the family relationships. So now she wants him to lead. Now she expects him to fulfill his role as the leader in the household, in the home, and to do that which she views as right and good, but not previously, not before, when she desired him to listen to her voice.

And so Abram's response is fairly typical of a lot of guys. Behold, your servant is in your power, do to her as you please. In other words, he's still not leading, he's still not doing exactly what he ought to do. He's simply saying, no, no, no, no, she's the servant.

He uses the word servant, the same word used to describe Hagar earlier. No, no, no, she's the servant. You're the wife, you still have the place of honor, do something about it. If you don't like the situation, deal with Hagar as you want to deal with her.

[31 : 00] Do with her what you will. And so we're told that Sarai began to treat her harshly. Now we don't know exactly what that means. It doesn't mean that she immediately began to beat her and whip her because a person in this station could not be treated in that way.

A person in this station could not be beaten as oftentimes a common slave might have been beaten. So it's not as if Sarai begins to immediately beat her and treat her terribly in that sense, but something that she does begins to show and demonstrate that Hagar will not ascend to a place of prominence in the home.

Whatever it is that Sarai is doing, perhaps it's demoting her to another station. Perhaps it's simply speaking to her and giving to her jobs that would have belonged to one of these more menial servants.

We don't really know what it is, but whatever it is, it eventually becomes terrible enough and bad enough that Hagar decides to simply run away. She's taking off. She's out of here.

Now that testifies to the great harshness of Sarai, whatever it was, because she's abandoning any sense of safety and security that she might have.

[32 : 09] She's pregnant. She's with child and she heads out into the wilderness. She runs away. She, of course, I think has a plan because verse 7 tells us that she was on her way to Shur.

S-H-U-R, the land of Shur. Now the land of Shur is sort of the border area between Egypt and the land of Canaan. It's a region.

It's not a city, but it's a region that kind of forms a barrier between Egypt and the land of Canaan. Now two times we've already been told in chapter 16 that Hagar is from Egypt.

There's no reason to tell us that. We don't necessarily need to know that about her. It doesn't help us initially to understand her, but it does help to explain what's happening here. Apparently, she's

headed back home.

Perhaps that's the only place of refuge that she could see for herself. Perhaps find her family. Perhaps get back to Egypt where she's at least familiar with the customs and the culture.

[33 : 10] Whatever it is, she's leaving Canaan. She's going back to Egypt to a place more familiar to her. But she never makes it there. She never makes it there because we are told that the angel of the Lord finds her.

He intercedes. He interrupts her. There are great consequences for our sin, and we're going to continue to see those. But something else that we're going to see in the midst of these great consequences for sin is also an outpouring of grace in the midst of it.

If you've ever been tempted to think that God has abandoned you totally and completely to the consequences of your sin, take another breath and realize you just took a breath and He hasn't completely abandoned you to the consequences of your sin.

He doesn't do that to Hagar here. Hagar is in a tough place. Hagar is in a difficult situation. And yet there in the midst of the wilderness as she's running away, the angel of the Lord confronts her. And notice the incredible outpouring of mercy and grace that she receives from the hand of the Lord. Verse 8, He speaks, Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?

[34 : 23] Once again, I think this echoes the language of Genesis 3, showing us that Hagar is not completely in the right either. Because what does God come and say when He walks in the garden after the fall?

He calls out, where are you? Of course He knows where they are. Of course the Lord and the angel of the Lord here, they are aware of where Hagar is and what Hagar is doing. This is not a question wanting information.

This is a question arresting them in their sin and causing them to stop and pause and think and consider. And that in and of itself is an act of mercy and grace on God's part.

Where have you come from? Where are you going? She says, I'm fleeing from my mistress, Sarai. And his response is to say to her, return and submit to her.

Don't run away. Don't throw off all authority around you. Don't do that. Return back to her. And then comes a promise that is almost shocking.

[35 : 28] He says, I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude. That should sound very familiar. That's the very language that God gives to Abram when He promises him offspring.

Offspring that cannot be numbered. And now the Lord is in a sense giving a very similar if not the same promise to Hagar out in the wilderness. We know, of course, as we continue to read the story, that Ishmael is not the one through whom the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled.

Ishmael is not the one and his descendants are not the ones through whom God will bring the ultimate seed of the woman, Jesus Christ Himself, into the world. He is not the one. He will not be. He cannot be. And yet, simply because of Ishmael's connection to Abram, there is a blessing that follows that God gives to Hagar.

There is mercy and there is grace in the middle of this entire messed up situation. And then he goes on. Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.

[36 : 38] You shall call his name Ishmael, which literally means God hears. You shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has listened to your affliction.

So there is mercy. There is grace. But again, it is happening within the midst of the consequences for sin.

Because what follows next is a description of the ongoing consequences for Abram and Sarai's sin. Notice the wording.

This is a description of Ishmael. He shall be a wild donkey of a man. In other words, He can't be tamed. He can't be held down. He'll be a wild donkey of a man.

His hand against everyone. And everyone's hand against Him. And He shall dwell over against all His kinsmen. Make no mistake, this is not good news for Hagar.

[37 : 39] She's received good news in that. She's going to have a son. He's going to himself have many descendants and he will himself be multiplied greatly just as Abram's other son eventually will be.

That's good news. But Ishmael and his descendants will occupy a place in God's plan for history that is not a place to be envied.

One of the things that we learn later on in Genesis, you can turn over a few pages if you'd like, to Genesis chapter 25 where we are coming to the end of the story of Abram or by this time Abraham. By the way, their names are going to get changed next week in chapter 17. Some of you have been wondering and I can't even keep them straight between Sarai and Sarah. They're so similar. But next week their names will be changed. But now here in chapter 25 we come to the end of the story of Abram and we receive at the end of this story a little short genealogy for Ishmael.

Verse 12 These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son. And then you look down to verse 18. Here's what happens with Ishmael's descendants. They settled from Havilah to Shur which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria.

[38 : 56] He settled over against all his kinsmen. Now, this region that Ishmael's descendants settle in is a region that today we would refer to as Arabia.

It's near Egypt but it's away from Egypt in the direction that you would travel from Egypt if you were going to go to Assyria. It's near there. It's near Egypt but it's not in Egypt.

It's on the Arabian Peninsula. And in fact, as we read through the rest of Scripture and even as we look at outside historical sources we find it highly, highly problematic that it is the Arab people who are the descendants of Ishmael.

In fact, Arabs themselves trace their lineage back to Ishmael so that these nomadic wandering people in the land of Arabia are the very people who are to be untamed.

Everyone's hand against them and their hand against everyone else. And then notably, I think probably the most important phrase in here is at the end of verse 18, he settled over against all his kinsmen which is an echo of verse 12 in chapter 16, he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.

[40 : 14] Now in both places there, there's a play on words. It could literally simply mean he's going to live in the place that's opposite from his kinsmen which is exactly what happens because eventually the descendants of Abraham through Isaac, the Israelites, dwell in the land of Canaan.

But if you jump over the near desert in the Negev in the southern regions of Canaan, if you leapfrog over that, you end up in Arabia, the place where the descendants of Ishmael are told, we're told that they live.

So literally they live opposite or over against them but the play on words is that they will actually be against them, that they will be opposed to them, that they will stand in their way and in their path at every turn and we find throughout history that that is indeed the case.

The repercussions of the sin of Abram and Sarai and even to a certain extent of Hagar extend even to our own day because the Islamic religion stems from the Arabian Peninsula.

Muhammad himself claimed to be a direct descendant of Ishmael. Whether or not that's true, we don't know. But what we do know is that there has been this continuing hostility and strife between these two peoples descended from Abraham.

[41 : 33] There has been to this very day strife, hostility and great evils have been done against one another throughout history. That has indeed been the case.

But it's not only the case for the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac. It is also the case and we see it continue today for those who in the New Testament are called the spiritual children of Abraham, the spiritual sons of Abraham by faith, that is the followers of Jesus, Christians, who even to this day continue to be greatly persecuted in those places where Islam dominates.

These are the consequences of Abraham's sin. These are the consequences of his failure to lead in the way that he ought to have led.

But as I said, throughout all of these things, we see God's grace weaving its way through. Hagar recognizes that in verse 13.

She called on the name of the Lord who spoke to her. You are a God of seeing, which I found to be a bit ironic because he identifies himself as the one who has listened to your plea.

[42 : 42] He tells her to name Ishmael. God hears or God listens and yet she says, you are a God who sees. I don't know what the implications of that are, but I find it very interesting that as she identifies him, though he has claimed for himself to be the God who hears, she recognizes not only does he hear, but he sees, he cares, he's taking care of her in the wilderness.

This will happen later on when she flees again. He takes care of her. He gives her mercy and grace. And there are historical reminders for this. Therefore, the well was called Ber Lahai Roy.

Roy, it lies between Kadesh and Berod. In other words, even the place where she is will be called the place where God, in fact, sees.

That word Roy is the word for see. He sees, he cares, he nurtures. Even as he allows us to suffer the consequences of our sins, he steps in and prevents us from experiencing those consequences to the full and to the uttermost.

Verse 15 is clear. Hagar bore Abram a son. Abram called the name of his son and Hagar bore! He bore Ishmael. She has her son. She's received back into the family of Abram.

[44 : 00] Her son is counted as Abram's son and is not some outcast. So much so that when we arrive at Genesis chapter 17 next week, we're going to see Abram pleading with God.

Oh, that your promises might be fulfilled through Ishmael! Because he doesn't have another son. He's promised another son but he doesn't want Ishmael to be left out. Oh, that they might be fulfilled through Ishmael!

And God simply says, no. There are consequences. There are great, grave consequences for your sin. And there are great and grave consequences for our sin as well.

We oftentimes find ourselves in the very place in which Sarai finds herself. Frustrated, despondent, in despair, knowing that God is in control, still believing many of the right things about God and yet in the moment and yet at the time so frustrated that we decide to do things our own way.

We have a better way to do things. We have a better way in which we can accomplish the things that we believe God wants to accomplish in and through us. We do that all the time.

[45 : 06] The followers of Christ do that. We, as believers, do that. We know what God's ways are. Not only what the end game is, but we know what God's ways are.

We know what kind of life He desires us to live. But sometimes living by those standards doesn't get us to the end result quickly enough. We want to be at that place where we believe God is taking us, but we want to be there far before He gets us there.

And so we come up with our own ideas. We come up with our own plans. We decide to go our own way. Perhaps you want to be able to provide more securely for your family.

You want to be able to give them things and to take care of them. And you know that that's a good and godly desire to want to take care of your family. And yet, rather than wait for God's provision, you decide to take a job that will pay more money.

Therefore, you can do a good thing and provide for your family what you know God desires. And yet, you take a job where you're going to have to work every Sunday from here on out for as long as you know and can see.

[46 : 14] And now, you have pursued something that is a good thing at the cost of something that is far better. Being and having your family and leading them to be among the people of God on a regular basis.

But because you see it dangling out there and you see that it's a good thing and you know that God wants you to be the provider, you try to rush toward it. Try to grab a hold of it before the time is right. Or perhaps you're in that stage of life of singleness and you so want to get married and you know that marriage is a good gift of God and you know that God has designed the vast majority of people for marriage.

Yes, there are those that God has set apart in giving them the gift of singleness, the Apostle Paul being one of them apparently. There are those, but for most people we know and recognize that God has designed us in such a way that we're to be married.

And so we have great desires to be married, but because of those great desires for a good thing that God Himself has created, we will rush headlong into things. We will fail to obey God and to be busy about doing God's business because we are so busy trying to find a mate.

[47 : 25] And you miss out on all the ways in which you could serve the Lord. Or to go even further, I have seen people get married when they ought not to get married because they so desperately want this good gift from God.

They try to obtain it in their own way. And they find themselves suffering the consequences year after year as they are in a hard and difficult marriage. There are always consequences.

And of course, there are times when those who do not know Christ, they hear the good news. To some degree, on some level or another, they understand that God saves people by grace alone through faith alone.

That that's the means that God has provided for our salvation. And He will do it in no other way. Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me. He's very clear about that. And the way to come to God through Christ is not to try to be like Jesus and therefore earn God's approval. That's not what Jesus means. What Jesus means is I must stand in your place.

[48 : 36] You must trust in Me to be your righteousness. You must trust in Me to take the penalty for your sin and then be your mediator between God. You cannot earn it.

You cannot put forth effort and think that God is going to reward that effort with eternal life. If you try to do that, then you are trying to earn a place among God's people in a way that God has not accepted in a way that will never ever work for you.

And yet, we are so stubborn that sometimes we think, I will just do more. I will just be better so that at the end of my life, the scales will be balanced in favor of good rather than evil and God will accept me.

And over and over the Scriptures are telling us that will not work. Yes, God desires to save people, but He will do it in His way and not in your way.

Yes, He desires to give the gift of eternal life to people. He will do it in His way and not your way.

You cannot earn it. Do not try to approach God and do not try to insert yourself among the people of God by your own means and in your own way.

[49 : 51] There is one way through simple faith in Jesus Christ. Over and over and over we find ourselves trying and trying to go our own way.

To aim at what we would consider and what oftentimes are good goals, even godly goals. And yet, I'm going to get there through my efforts.

Or I'm going to get there through my ingenuity. Or I'm going to get there by going this way because I'm tired of waiting for this direction to open up. And what you need to know and to understand is that if you have done that and if you are in the midst of that, there will be consequences for that.

There will be consequences. And sometimes those consequences continue on for a long time. But here's what you need to hear. That in the midst of those consequences, there is great and unfathomable grace that God extends.

Because as the story goes on, Ishmael does in fact have many, many descendants. Ishmael does in fact dwell in a land of his own. But as the story goes on for Abram and Sarai, God does indeed provide a son through Sarai, through their one flesh union.

[51 : 04] He does. And that son has a son. And that son has many sons. And they have many descendants. And through those descendants ultimately comes the Messiah who brings in salvation.

Not just to the people who are descended from Isaac, but to everyone who trusts in him. Do not read of the consequences of Abram's failure and think that any race, that any people group are cut off from the grace of God.

Because not only is there this common grace weaving its way through every people group on the face of the earth, now in Christ. There is coming to every people. To Jews, to Greeks, to Romans, to the barbarians in the north from the perspective of the Romans.

That's a lot of us. To the Europeans. To those in Africa. To the descendants of Ishmael. There is coming great, unfathomable grace through Christ by which from out of all of those people groups God is saving a people for his name.

That's exactly what he has been doing from the moment that he called Abram and sent him out to the land of promise. Let's pray. do you do a favor for those who do you