

GENESIS 16: 1-16 5-11-14
THE GOD WHO SEES

Our passage on this Mother's Day is one that is about motherhood and two mothers. One who was expecting and one who was restlessly and impatiently waiting to be so blessed.

Genesis 16: **1-16**

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me." 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence. 7 Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." 9 Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority. 10 Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count 11 The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.13 Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered

What a wonderful, wonderful story of grace, and with it, several life lessons to be gleaned from the testimony of those who have gone before us. There are three human characters in our story. Abram, Sarai his wife, and Hagar who was a household servant, the maid of Sarai, and, as we have noted, an expectant mother. We shall examine the role of each in this story, beginning with Sarai.

Sarai is the wife of a wealthy, famous man of God. She is in some respects one to be envied. A lot of you women here would love to be the wife of a wealthy, famous man of God. We know also that Sarai was beautiful. It would seem that she is a woman who has it all. But Sarai was also a woman to be pitied because she was the old wife of a wealthy old man of God and most of all, Sarah was barren. She had born her husband no children and the pain of this in her soul could hardly be spoken. Many a night she would sob her way to sleep over the deprivation that clouded her life. What kept her going for years had been the promise.

You know the promise, right? God had told her husband that he would have many descendants. And since Sarai was his only wife she figured that was good news for her. But month after month after month went by. Year after year and Sarai did not conceive. And she began to experience the senior jitters. She fell victim to doubt and convinced herself that it could never happen for her. The waiting had been killing Sarai. She felt that she was letting her husband down, maybe even letting God down. 2 *So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her."* And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

What was done here by our two heroes was not unusual in their culture. They played by American league rules - designated hitters for barren women were allowed. Their neighbors would not have been scandalized by it. But it was wrong in the sight of God. Polygamy, no matter how prevalent in the Old Testament, always was wrong in God's sight whose plan for marriage is one man and one woman for life. But Sarai promoted it because she made the mistake of rationalizing. Do you know what that is? Rationalizing, which is actually irrationalizing, is a term which describes the process by which we try to make sin sound reasonable. Most of us have lots of expertise and experience at this. We say to ourselves: "Hmm, there are no Christian men pursuing me, I know God wants me to be a wife, so He must want me to marry this unbeliever. He must be planning to use me to help him." Fit the story to your own circumstances. Sarai's and Abram's (for they were in this together) was that God had said Abram would have an heir from his own body. Sarai was pretty much proven to be barren. Therefore, they conclude - God must want Abram to have a child by another woman. After all, God never mentioned Sarai's name in the promise. He just said the child would be Abram's. Hmm! The loophole hunters had come onto something. Makes sense, if you exclude from this the power of God. That was the mistake. Looking for loopholes rather than looking for the hand of the Almighty. We often do this in contexts where God is making us wait. One lesson from my experience of waiting for a new pastoral position for over two years is that waiting is hard. I found myself once in a position where if I just tweaked the truth a little bit I would have had a lovely job. And after all, God wants me to provide for my family right? Don't justify sin by appealing to your predicament. And don't go looking for loopholes in the law of God. It's always better to trust and obey. Easier said than done, I know. But that is the lesson behind Sarai and Abram's sin.

This doesn't mean they were awful, bad people. They weren't – not comparatively. Abram and Sarai were stellar, but they were still flawed. Sarai pressured her husband into sin with Hagar. And then, get this, (oh this is classic) she turns on Abram after he follows her counsel. *4-5 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me."* Goodness Sarai! What a horrible attitude this is! Rather than repenting over her faithless decision she jumps on Abram and blames him because he actually succeeded in getting Hagar pregnant. Verse 5 sounds like a Country and Western song. You know, some of those songs have great titles. Songs like, I'm So Miserable Without You It's Almost Like Having You Here. "When the Phone Don't Ring, You'll Know Its Me" or "My Wife Run Off With my best friend and I sure do miss him." This one by Sarah could be, "The Price I Paid, since you loved the Maid." Or maybe, "I feel bereaved since the cook conceived." In any case, Sarai is singing, "You done me wrong, big fella." In so doing, she becomes a villain in the story. She is bad to Hagar and bad to Abram. Is she a bad woman? No. What is she? She is an inconsistent woman. In I Peter chapter 3 you wives are pointed to Sarai as an example. So Sarai was a fine, respectful, submissive wife, but not all the time. She had her moments, her inconsistencies. My point? Don't label someone for their occasional mistakes. Just because she did something dishonoring to Abram doesn't mean she was a dishonoring woman. Just because she was unloving here, doesn't mean she is unloving. It means, that she, like all of us was not perfect, and was therefore, inconsistent. So, point three under Sarah is not the mean, ugly, insubmissive wife, but the inconsistent wife. There is a big difference!

Finally on Sarah we look at what she needs. What does Sarah need? If you were the doctor of her soul what medicine would you prescribe? I'm prescribing a healthy dose of love, administered directly to the heart. She needs to know she is loved and valued by God. Sarai had begun to think that God didn't care about her. Abram maybe, but not her. And she was responding like an unloved woman. And listen, when you are angry at God, when you feel that you are being picked on, you are in a very dangerous position - highly vulnerable to the temptations of Satan. Maybe there is a hint of blaming God when Sarai says in verse 2, "the Lord has prevented me from bearing children." It has often been said that God's delays are not God's denials, but Satan whispers to us, "Hey, God is holding out on you. If He loved you things would be different! Better start looking

out for yourself.” That is why the prayer of Paul in Ephesians is so right on. “*That you may know the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.*” When you know you are loved by God, then you are in a position to love others, even in the midst of your own pain and disappointment.

That is the lesson from Sarah’s part in the story. Let’s look now at Abram. He is the sub-villain here. His mistake is in verse 2. “He listened to the voice of his wife.” Meaning that he followed her advice rather than God’s principles for living. Under pressure he makes a bad decision. Who’s to blame for his decision? Careful guys! Think about yourself as you answer this one. Who is to blame? The pressuring wife or the wimpy husband? I’ll accept the answer “both.” But, gentlemen, receiving some bridal pressure is no excuse for foolishness. We men sometimes excuse ourselves for bad decisions that we made. Sarai didn’t force Abram here. Sure, she may have griped if he refused her request, but so what? Obey God, not men, and not even women. The cost of what Abram did here was enormous. Do you know that the son conceived by Hagar became the father of the Arab world? How have the Jews gotten along with the Arabs over the centuries? Yikes! The president of the Arab nation of Iran recently said “Israel should be wiped off the map!” This is the country building the nuclear weapons. What is next is just the continuation of what has been for centuries between Jews and Arabs. We are talking major grief that has come from this! And initially they thought this was a grand success. It worked! She conceived! Abram’s going to have his promised child! Scottish novelist George MacDonald was right when he wrote, “In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably, or succeed more miserably.” Oof! That describes Abram here doesn’t it! Miserable success! When your goal is sin, failure is a gift. ® The cost of his success would be enormous.

What then does Abram need here? Doctor of the soul, what do you prescribe? My prescription would be a larger dose of trust in the promise of God, the very patient variety, fortified by the iron that would make him a man of uncompromising principle who is not so easily swayed by his fears of what others may do.

Next, we come to Hagar. She is not Hagar the horrible, the powerful Viking warrior. She is Hagar the Egyptian maid, servant to the wife of mighty Abram. Her position, far below that of our other two characters in this drama. Her sin? Position doesn’t change the heart - the sin of lowly Hagar is that of pride. *4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.* To despise means to think little of. Hagar now

looks down her nose at Sarai. “Look at you. All these chances and you have no baby. I’m one for one.” Hagar let it go to her head. Proverbs 30 includes this fascinating observation **21-23** *Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up: 22 Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, 23 Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.* Proverbs says to watch out when this happens. Hagar is the classic case. Her conception led to a misconception that she was better than Sarai. Her superior attitude changed the relationship and Sarai didn’t take well to her servants new face. Conflict ensued. No surprise there! Sarai becomes harsh in her dealing with Hagar. She likely wants to remind the uppity servant of her place. And as a result Hagar gets mad and leaves. **6cd** *Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.* Now she’s done it. All alone, pregnant, in the middle of the desert. She has offended her boss. Not a good place. How did she get there? Just days before she was the new second string wife of a wealthy man. Now she has nothing. What did it was pride. Proverbs 11:**2a** *when pride comes, then comes dishonor.* Proverbs 16:**18a** *Pride goes before destruction.* Hagar is a the poster girl for the proverbs isn’t she? Ever lose something precious to you because of your pride? Because you were unwilling to be treated as less than you deserved? Some of you have lost marriages, and children, and friends. You know, a lot of people have lost churches because of this. A common reason I hear why someone leaves their church is that they were mistreated by someone else. They weren’t honored as they thought they should have been. “So and so said this to me.” And where do you go? Into the desert! Be done with your pride my friend! It’s not worth what you are forfeiting to keep it. It’s not. It’s not. You keep your pride you lose you family, you keep your pride you lose your church, you keep your pride you lose your job. I’m not talking about keeping your dignity and your principles, I’m talking about that determination that others should honor me or that I should have my way. It is ugly and it’s damning. Look at what Hagar was about to throw away. Abram’s house wasn’t perfect, but it was the best place on earth.

May I be personal for a moment? As you might expect, in my world I have a lot of conversations with pastors, and it seems like many of them are not very happy in the ministry. There is a lot of complaining about other pastors, and about their elders. One fellow pastor said to me with great emotion, he said, “The ministry stinks.” I understand his pain. This is not always the most comfortable post to man, but dear friends, the church of the Lord Jesus with all its flaws is the best

place on earth. Remember that. Our friend, Hagar, has forgotten that. Maybe a little desert air and a hungry night was what she needed to remind her. But she got more than that.

The second thing we see as we look at Hagar's story is the Lord coming to the rescue. What a verse is this verse 7 *Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur.* First of all, when it says, the angel of the Lord, I don't have time to cover this well, but this is apparently a preincarnation appearance of God the Son. This is a visitation by the Lord Himself as we will clearly see. And the magnificent thing that brings tears to my eyes as I read it is that the Lord God came after this servant girl in the desert. What a God we have! What a Shepherd! Out here at a spring in the wilderness God sets up the original crisis pregnancy center. That is a ministry to expectant mothers who are in need of help. Vera Marelli, in our church, runs one of these. Tom Krahe is on the board of one. My wife and I were just out to our local Womens Choice Network center praying for the vital work that goes on there. These are ministries close to the heart of God. My wife set up a crisis pregnancy center in Florida in 1980. Some great folks have set up quite a few here in the Pittsburgh area. But God beat them to it. And all we do is follow His example when we reach out to pregnant women in distress. Verse 11 contains a beautiful word from the Lord to Hagar and to all her descendants. There she is told she will have a son and the reason given there 11e *Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.* Think about that. We don't know if Hagar called out to God or not, but God heard. What did he hear? Her affliction. Do you see what that says about him? Your sorrows cry to him even when you do not. Spurgeon says, "Grief has an eloquent voice when mercy is the listener. Woe has a plea which goodness cannot resist." Oh my, God looked beyond her fault and saw her need. He came and found her. That's the way it is with God isn't it? He finds us. We don't come running to him until He first finds us and restores our souls. So it is that He met with many of us when he aroused our consciences and made us pause in our headlong rush into sin. Aren't you glad we have a seeking God? Aren't you glad we have a good shepherd who comes to get us when we stray? Oh what a precious truth! And I have to believe that some of you are here today in the same condition as Hagar. You are straying, you are running away from God's provision. God is speaking to you now through this word. Listen to Him.

8 *He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."* The question posed by the Lord set Hagar up to convict herself. Where are you coming from and where going? "I'm leaving the best

place on earth and going to who knows where.” There is no good reason to do this. And her only reason was to maintain some silly form of self-respect. She abandoned her post and her privilege. Her only argument could be, “Surely the Lord wouldn’t expect me to put up with that kind of treatment would he?” Well, maybe He does. *9 Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority."* The plainest teaching on this is in I Peter chapter 2:**18** *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.* Does that speak to Hagar? Does it speak to you? **19** *For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.* Does God expect you to put up with ill-treatment? Yes. Don’t hear me saying that you should take physical abuse without reporting it. Don’t hear me saying you shouldn’t talk with the abuser, and seek a change. But do hear me say that obedience to God and Christlikeness demands that we put up with a whole lot more than most of us are willing to endure. Someone said that you know if you have the heart of a servant by how you react when you are treated like one. © Pastors get tested on this often. People will use you, use you, use you. Maybe they praise you some but then when they are done with you and find another more attractive pastor or nicer church they throw you in the rag bag without even a word. You find out if you have the heart of a servant by how you react when you are treated like one. I heard a true story from a pastor who was asked out to a home of a couple not in his church so that he could pray for the woman’s healing. When he arrived he asked why they didn’t call their own pastor and they explained that they were concerned that he might catch her illness. You find out if you have the heart of a servant by how you react when you are treated like one.

There we are again, talking about humility. Hagar was in a fix. She was in a jam. What should she do? What did the angel of the Lord say to do? Submit yourself. © That is a call to humility is it not? She would need to go back apologetically and contritely. That is tough when you have been wronged. But God exalts the humble. In verse 10-12 the Lord says, “I will exalt you.” But in verse 9 He says, “humble yourself.” The solution to Hagar’s dilemma was found in humility. The solutions to your dilemmas are likely found there too. Hagar could have said to herself, “Never! Never will I go back to that woman!” Pride would kill Hagar at this point. But let me tell ya. Lots of women and men and boys and girls have chosen death over humility. The tragic part of it is that the proud have failed to see the exaltation that comes after you humble yourself. I Peter 5:**6** *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper*

time. There is another important verse after that one. And it relates to our story too. The next verse in I Peter 5 says 7 *casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.* This was the grand illumination for Hagar. This was the thing, even more than the awesomeness of God, that led to her repentance. It was the goodness of God. As we did for Sarai and Abram, we ask about Hagar, “what does she need?” What does the soul Dr. prescribe for her? The remedy for Hagar is described in the text. She, much like Sarai, needs to know that she is valued by God, that she is somebody, just because God knows her and cares for her. In verse 10 God gives her an incredible promise of many descendants. He promises a son. And in verse 13-14 *Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi.* The name of that well was, “the well of the living one who sees me.” You tell me - what transformed the situation for Hagar? What thrilled her heart? It was the knowledge that God knew and cared. What a difference that makes in our lives! Do you know that? Do you know that you are valued by the almighty, that every hair is numbered? When you do it makes anything bearable. On the other hand there is nothing so devastating to the human spirit as suffering alone and in obscurity. You have to know there is a God who sees and who cares. That was the wonderful discovery of Hagar. Have you discovered it my friend? There is a wonderful hymn to a difficult tune that we won’t sing, but we will read as we close. It asks the important question, “*Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song: As the burdens press and the cares distress, and the way grows weary and long? Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear? As the daylight fades into deep night shades, does he care enough to be near? Does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed to resist some temptation strong: when for my deep grief I find no relief though my tears flow all the night long? Does Jesus care when I’ve said goodbye to the dearest on earth to me. and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks, is it aught to him does he see?” Recognize that question? What did Hagar name the well? What did she call her Lord? The God who sees. Does He see? Does He care? The refrain of that hymn repeatedly answers the repeated question. “*Oh yes He cares, I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.*”*

We have covered so much today, discussed so many precious truths and important lessons. How God has spoken to you I can only guess, but you take a moment to pray in silence as the musicians come to play.