



## The Patriarchs | The Gospel According to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

### The Outcast and the Calm Before the Storm

Genesis 21.9ff

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9.16.12

*Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. <sup>10</sup> Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." <sup>11</sup> The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. <sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. <sup>13</sup> "And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." <sup>14</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. <sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup> God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. <sup>18</sup> "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." <sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. <sup>20</sup> God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. <sup>21</sup> He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.*

<sup>22</sup> *Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do; <sup>23</sup> now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned." <sup>24</sup> Abraham said, "I swear it." <sup>25</sup> But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. <sup>26</sup> And Abimelech said, "I do not know who*

*has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor did I hear of it until today."* <sup>27</sup> Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. <sup>28</sup> Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. <sup>29</sup> Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?" <sup>30</sup> He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well." <sup>31</sup> Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath. <sup>32</sup> So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. <sup>33</sup> Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. <sup>34</sup> And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

Today begins a *NEW* teaching series here at St. Andrews. Last year, during the Fall months, we began looking at The First Book of Moses, first book of the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis and we ended at Christmas with the long awaited birth of the promised son, Isaac (a lot of parallels between *waiting for that promised son* AND for the One we celebrate at Christmas – two advents, two sons of promise, Isaac and Jesus Christ).

Today, it's my task to get us back into that ancient world, the world of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and to begin seeing together that they were part of a story, a part of God's story and of OUR story...if we enter into it by faith. THEY were BELIEVERS in the Gospel, and, in some ways CHARACTERS *in the Gospel that all Christians believe*. They were instruments (broken and flawed) in God's plan to rescue the world.

We'll see them, making mistakes...and recovering. We'll see them sinning and repenting and little by little we'll see THEM believing and God making them into new people through whom HE will bless the world with grace.

Today, to get us back into the story and back to our **roots**, let's look at #1 – *Where we are* #2 – Well, Well, Well! and #3 – *Worshiping and Walking With Abraham*.

We first met Abraham when he was a pagan and a part of a family of idol-worshippers living in Iraq (the Babylonians). And God called him out. God chose him and God revealed Himself to "Abram" (as he was called) and God made big, BIG promises to Abraham and Sarah: He promised to make this infertile couple into a great nation, to give them a great land and to make them a blessing to the world (Genesis Ch. 12.)

We said last year that in some ways, *this (calling of Abraham)* is the climax of the entire Bible (even though it's at the start) because *THIS* is the entre of the solution to the conflict. Abraham's people were chosen to bless the world, "In you will all the nations

be blessed..." The Jewish people will be the City on a Hill; salvation is OF the Jews; grace will come through them...the People of Abraham.

The problem of course is that Abraham doesn't have a people...and they are old and ...too old to have children. So...while Abraham and Sarah struggle to rest (important oxymoron) as they try to believe God and His promises...the biological clock is ticking (actually the alarm is ringing!) and they begin to ask how THEY are "gonna make this happen!" They're very uncomfortable believing and they (like all of us) would rather DO on our devices rather than rest and receive on God's terms.

So, God brings Abraham through a pattern of obstacle and advance, obstacle and advance, obstacle and advance. Situations and people stand in the way of Abraham's believing and God keeps stepping in to remove the obstacle and to move Abraham and Sarah ahead in believing.

At one point, Sarah came up with a surrogacy plan. She had a servant and she arranged for her (Hagar) to sleep with Abraham and THAT would be that way they...sort of...helped God to bless them. Hagar, the Egyptian servant, gave birth to Ishmael (it means: God hears)...but it was not God's plan and led to a whole lot of domestic strife (as you'd imagine!) Their home was itself an obstacle and a reminder of their unbelief. But God kept moving them ahead...sculpting their faith. (17.21)

And as they advance...the promises get more specific. "This child will come from Abraham's body...(then) will come from Sarah's body ...(and finally) will come within the next YEAR!"

And it was during this year (the end of the long wait) that another obstacle emerged, a king named Abimelech. He wanted Sarah for his harem and Abraham said that Sarah was his sister (not his wife) and he apparently said that SO THAT this king would honor him and not kill him. If this was Abraham's sister than I should pay him a dowry and take him to a football game (as a brother in law)...if it's his wife then I should kill Abraham and take her! (That's what Abraham feared!)

And now, the apparently fertile Sarah (a year away from giving birth to the child of the covenant/of promise) is in the harem of a pagan king – everything is in jeopardy!

BUT before anything can happen (between Sarah and this pagan king) God appears to Abimelech in a dream...and says, "You're as good as dead! You took my man's wife!!"

And Abimelech pleads with God in his dream, “But wait! He lied! YOUR MAN lied to me and said that she was his sister!”

So, after God’s counsel, and when the whole house is terrified of this man Abraham, the king wisely returns Sarah *to the blessed liar* and he gives huge, king-sized gifts to Abraham and Sarah and gingerly sends them on their way, “Come back soon! Mi casa es su casa! Anything you need is yours.” And Abraham sort of apologizes and he prays for Abimelech’s house (where people have already begun to get sick) and God heals everyone and blesses Abimelech’s whole house, “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12.3)

Then, Sarah has the baby. The promised son arrives and she names him “*Laughter*” (Isaac) because when God told them about such old people having a baby, they laughed...AND because NOW, that the baby has arrived they’re laughing again...”Everyone who hears about this will laugh WITH me” rejoices the mother, Sarah.

And immediately someone does laugh! *Not laughing WITH Sarah but AT her!* It’s, Hagar, the young, fertile servant girl whose son is now about 14 years old. And Hagar, the gloating servant, thinks this is like a weird side-show (“*step right up see the 90 year old mother!*”)... She mocks her and...Sarah says, “She has to go!”

So Abraham (though troubled about his own son – Ishmael – who never gets named by anyone – the boy, the lad, her son) Abraham has to deal with this...has to have domestic harmony returned. “Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.” (Genesis 21.10)

So, after God says that He will cover Abraham’s mess and He will take care of the widow and the orphan, Abraham takes bread and water and sends “that maid and her son” into the wilderness.

And when they run out of water...she sits the boy under a bush and goes away to die (can’t bear to see her as yet un-named lad die of thirst).

But God hears – that’s the child’s name, remember? – God hears, (“I-shema-el”) – God makes sure we don’t forget the name of this “maid’s son” – it’s “Ishmael” – God hears! And God saves the child for a great future, a wife, an occupation...And God saves them by enabling the outcast to see a source of water...of life... satisfaction ... a WELL.

In fact there are three mentions of that word (vv.19, 25, 30) and that's why I called it "well, well, well". The second story is also about a well.

Abimelech is back...just wants to check up on Abraham. He realizes this man is a prophet-priest and that God has chosen and blessed him. So the king asks, "Are we still ok...enjoying the gifts and the land?"

Abraham, says, "Yeah! No hard feelings! And thanks for those gifts but...uh...now that you mention it (if I'm being open and honest...*and I am*)... I dug a well and your ranch-hands took it away! That's not fair..."

So Abimelech says, "What!? I told those guys to give you carte blanche...complete freedom! Mr. Abraham, sir, I'm gonna get to the bottom of this asap!"

But Abraham says, "No...it's not like that. Let's do it this way..."

So he takes seven lambs and puts them aside...and says, "Here, you take this complete number of lambs and by taking them it'll signify that we have an agreement – I'm not here to power over you and make you call me sir...I'm actually here to bless you...that's how this grace thing works!"

Abraham is learning not to take matters into his own hands. He's learning that he doesn't have to lie and manipulate and cajole – he can rest and He can count on God to care for him...and God will bless him so he can bless the nations...**THAT'S HOW IT IS TO LIVE BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.**"

So, everyone was happy ("well, well, well"). They struck a deal, a covenant, and the king and his general went home. And Abraham worshiped God and walked with Him as if to say, "Wow! It's wonderful to rest in God and to receive what God has promised and not to force it ... to take my place as a son in God's house instead of a slave and an orphan who has to make it happen... I am free to be honest and open and generous...and it makes me want to worship!"

So that's what he does: he plants a tree as if to say; God is planting me in this land...I have as much to do with it as this tree has to do with planting itself. I, like this tree, am a receiver...a believer...I am little by little being rooted in grace.

And he calls on the name of the permanent God – the Everlasting God. You are with in at every stage in my life...unchanging and faithful to your promises. Even when I don't

see what you're doing or think "That's not how I'd do it!" still you are faithful and in this moment, I see it and feel it and I name You and worship you.

And then Abraham walked through that land...like a pilgrim. Calling on the name of the everlasting God also implies proclamation. Abraham was sharing his joy with others...telling others about His faithful God.

And for us...who, like Abraham, have also received the Child of Promise, looking at Him, Jesus Christ, assures us that God keeps His promises and can be trusted! Believing in the Gospel...resting in Jesus Christ is just this way. He is to us, the Well that we did not see until God opened our eyes to see Him and we drank...and are becoming satisfied. "Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." John 7.37

He is the Tree of remembrance...cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. He is our "tamarisk tree"...cursed in our place so that all the sin/shame which made me afraid to approach or trust God is taken away – Jesus Christ was cursed in my place so that I could be blessed...and be **made** a blessing to others.

He is the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and in Him all the nations will be blessed.

He is making us who believe into people of grace. He says look to Abraham the rock from which you were hewn (Isa 51.1-2 *"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug. **Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gave birth to you**"*). God is saying, "As I hewed Abraham and Sarah I'm also carving you who have trusted Abraham's greater Son, Jesus Christ. Learn what I really want from you: it's not your doing but your resting...and when you learn what Abraham was learning, it'll make you open, honest, generous, peaceful and *alive to worship and walk in the land of the Philistines* calling on the Name of the Everlasting God.

God used Abraham to demonstrate repentance for the Gentiles, so that Abimelech saw the liar come clean and Abraham became open and humble and not defensive or rough – so God enables us to repent before our friends and families and become less defensive and more open and honest.

The other night I was here for the opening night of ESL (English Classes). I don't often go but whenever I do I'm blown away: this team of people from this church, true children

of Abraham in Jesus Christ, *they're being a blessing to the nations* in this very open, honest, *no-strings-attached* way.

People come to find hope and opportunity for themselves and their families...and who is greeting the Nations when they come – it's the children of Abraham, the Church of Jesus Christ. "In you will the nations be blessed" and I saw it the other night so vividly.

Are you being rooted in grace (freed from impressing others and freed from manipulating because you know you don't have to do that...you know that Jesus paid it all)? And are you moved to worship and walk – calling on the name of the everlasting God who keeps His promise? I hope you drink from the deeper well in the coming weeks and put roots down into the life of grace.

The next chapter opens on a very different note...because AFTER "the calm before the storm" ...*comes*... the storm...tune in next week.