

When God Closes a Door!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 October 2023

Preacher: Rob Attridge

[0 : 00] everyone. So great to see you all this morning. Well, this morning we're going to be continuing our series in the book of Genesis. We're going to continue to look at the life of Abraham, and we're picking up from where we left off last week, which means this week we are coming to Genesis chapter 16, and we're going to be looking at verses 1 to 16. Now, I've asked Helen if she'll come in and read our passage for us this morning. So thank you, Helen. Genesis chapter 16, verses 1 to 16.

Now Sarai, Abraham's wife, had borne him no children, but she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar. So she said to Abraham, the Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave. Perhaps I can build a family through her. Abraham agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abraham had been living in Canaan 10 years, Sarai, his wife, took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abraham, you are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me. Your slave is in your hands, Abraham said. Do with her whatever you think best.

Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar, so she fled from her. The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert. It was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going? I'm running away from my mistress Sarai, she answered.

Then the angel of the Lord told her, go back to your mistress and submit to her. The angel said, added, I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.

The angel of the Lord also said to her, you are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael. For the Lord has heard of your misery.

[2 : 33] He will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him. And he will live in hostility towards all his brothers.

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her. You are the God who sees me. For she said, I have now seen the one who sees me. That is why the well was called Bir Lahairoi. It is still there between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had born. Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Thanks, Helen. Yes, Lord, we just pray that you would use your word this morning to encourage our hearts, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, I'm not exactly sure why I'm telling you all of this, but anyway, I'm going to share with you all one of my most embarrassing stories.

One time, mom and dad were away and I wanted to go up to their house to get something from their kitchen, probably some biscuits or something like that. We live a field apart, so going up and down to get biscuits is a normal enough thing to do. But anyway, when I went up to the house, there was one big problem. Of course, the front door was locked. All of the doors were locked.

So instead of going home like a normal person would without biscuits, I decided what I would do is I would try to get in through the window. So I jumped up onto the windowsill and I reached in through the small part of the window, which was open. And the plan was to reach in through the small part of the window so I could reach down and open the latch for the bigger part of the window.

[4 : 38] But the problem was I couldn't quite reach the big latch. So in order to reach the latch for the bigger part of the window, I needed to kind of squeeze halfway in through the small window.

Well, just as I was halfway in the small window, reaching down with my legs kind of in the air behind me, didn't the car pull up outside. And there I was halfway in this window, halfway out of the window, as I said, with my legs in the air behind me. And it's fair to say at that point, I was a little bit

embarrassed. I'm not exactly sure what they saw. But from that point on, I kind of decided that trying to get in through windows when the door was not open was not the best idea. You know, they must have been thinking, what in the world is wrong with this fella halfway in the window? But you know what? In a spiritual sense, this is also not the best idea. If God in his timing has closed the door, whatever that might be in our lives, it is not the best idea to try to force our own way in the window, so to speak, just to get what we want because we want it now. And simply put, I think this is a great expression. It's a quote that I came across recently. When God closes a door, don't try to get in through the window. In other words, if God is closing a door at a particular time in our lives, whatever that might be, we must not take matters into our own hands and force our own way through at all costs just to get something that we want now. [6 : 32] Why? Well, because forcing our own way in the window and taking matters into our own hands at all costs before the Lord has opened the door will only lead to us operating in the flesh and causing a mess. Well, the reason why I say all of this is because forcing their own way in through a window at all costs when God had not yet opened the door is exactly what we see Abram and Sarai do in this passage. We see in these verses that the Lord had not yet opened the door for Abram and Sarai to have their promised children. And instead of being patient, instead of waiting on the Lord and trusting in him and his timing, they chose to instead take matters into their own hands. They chose to force their own way through at all costs. What did they do? Well, we know from our reading what they did.

In verses 1 to 4, we are reminded that Sarai had not yet become pregnant with their promised children. The Lord had not yet opened that door. So they took matters into their own hands. They decided between them that Abraham would essentially sleep with another woman. They decided that Abraham would sleep with their Egyptian slave Hagar so that true Hagar, Abram might finally get and Sarai might finally get the offspring that they so desperately wanted. And that is what happened. We read in verse 4 that Abram slept with Hagar and she conceived. I think this really is a classic example of forcing your own way at all costs when the Lord has not yet opened the door. I think at this point, at the very least, Abram and Sarah, they lacked two things, trust and patience. They lacked trust to believe that the Lord would do what he said he would do, that he would give them their children. We've seen in previous chapters the Lord has promised to make them into a great nation. to give them descendants more numerous than they could count. Well, they lacked trust to believe that the Lord would do what he said he would do. And they lacked patience to wait for his timing in this. They lacked trust and patience. They took matters into their own hands. And in doing that, they were operating according to their own wisdom, their own desires, their own scheming, and their own timing. And this did lead to problems and suffering and mess.

[9 : 36] And we see this mess in verses 5 and 6 with this kind of triangle of mess between them all. Basically, when Hagar became pregnant, she began to despise Sarah.

Well, in response, you would imagine due to jealousy and things like this, Sarah began to despise Hagar. And she ended up mistreating Hagar. So Hagar ran away. And then there's Abraham, the woman who is now bearing his only offspring to date, has ran away. And his wife, Sarah is there kind of saying that it's his fault, even though it seemed to be kind of both of their ideas.

It's just a complete mess between them all. They fell into the trap of forcing their own way at all costs before the Lord had opened the door.

Well, I don't know about you, but when I look at Abraham and Sarah at this point, I find it so easy to look at them and kind of think, you know, what in the world were they thinking?

[10 : 52] You know, what were they doing? How could they be thinking this way? You know, what's wrong with them? But then I just take one look at my own heart, and I can see that I am no better, in the sense that when I feel like the Lord has closed a door in my life, or if I feel like the Lord is not opening a door fast enough, well, then there's often a desire in me to want to force my own way forward, because I don't want to wait, or I think that somehow it might not happen if I don't push my own way forward.

When doors are not opening fast enough, trust and patience is a challenge for me, and I think that it might be a challenge for all of us.

Closed doors are a challenge for us all. For some of us, this might be at work. You know, you want to take the next step in work, but somehow the Lord has not yet opened the door for that to happen.

Maybe some of us are waiting for an answer. We're waiting for an answer on something, but somehow the Lord has not yet opened the door for us to have an answer. For some of us, this might be a relationship.

We would love to see a relationship develop in some way, but the Lord has not yet opened the door for that to happen.

[12:26] For some of us, this might be in our marriage. You know, maybe one of us would love to do something, but the door is not yet open for that, because maybe our spouse might be unsure about it.

For some of us, this might be a ministry that you would love to see happen, but for some reason it's not developing yet, or maybe it's not developing as fast as you would want it to.

It could be anything. But whatever it is, when the Lord has not yet opened the door for something that we think we want and need, it is a huge challenge to not take matters into our own hands at all costs and try to force our way in through the window, kind of around the back kind of way in doing things.

Because that would generally only lead to mess and problems. And so with that in mind, I just want to share three thoughts, kind of three encouragements in relation to this.

Number one is for those of us who have just come across a closed door in life and are kind of wondering what to do with it.

[13:42] Well, I just want to encourage you to not force your own way at all costs. I want to encourage you not to take matters into your own hands and force your own way through.

Instead, I want to encourage you to look to the Lord and to wait on Him and trust in Him, trust in Him for His timing that He will open the right door at the right time.

Because He will. You know, He loves each one of us in here more than we could ever know. And He wants what's best for each one of us in here.

More than we could ever know. And He will, therefore, open the right door at the right time. And I think that this is key.

That when the Lord opens the right door at the right time, it will never require sin to walk through it. When the Lord opens the right door, it will never require sin in order to go through it.

[14:48] He will open the right door. Number two is for those of us who have a closed door in life, but we're maybe a little step further, that we've already started to push our own way forward.

You know, we've already started to take matters into our own hands. Maybe you're a bit like me, already kind of halfway in through the window. Well, I want to encourage you just to take a step back and to wait on the Lord again, to freshly look to Him, because mess and heartache can still perhaps be prevented.

To take a step back and wait on Him. And then number three, if you are here this morning and you have already forced your own way all the way in through the window, the window might be broken and you're all the way in there and you're somehow standing in the mess, maybe of your own making, well, I want to encourage you to know that our sins, they are many, but His mercy is more. I want you to know that in the middle of the mess that you might have even caused by yourself, or you had part in making, God's grace is there for us.

That's what we see in this passage, because despite what Abraham and Sarai did, and despite even the failings of Hagar, the Lord showed them all His incredible mercy and grace in many ways.

[16:19] Hagar first, well, the Lord showed His grace to Hagar. Hagar was at this time a nobody. She was in this culture a nobody. In fact, someone said, she was at this time a nobody, a foreign slave girl from Egypt.

Yet the Lord of heaven saw her in her distress and He dealt gently with her. The Lord saw her distress and He cared for her.

He's the God who sees, He's the God who knows, He's the God who cares. The angel of the Lord, we see in these verses, met her in the desert and spoke to her.

And through this, we see in verses 7 to 14 that the Lord brought her back from her distress in the desert and He gave her a future and He gave her a hope.

God showed His grace to Hagar in these verses. And then God also showed His grace to Abraham and Sarah in that even after taking matters into their own hands, even after their lack of trust and patience, and even after their completely making a mess of things, the Lord did not cast them aside.

[17 : 39] I mean, looking at Abraham and Sarah at this point, the Lord could have easily said, you know, I've had enough of these two. I mean, we've seen in previous chapters that Abraham has already lied about his wife to Pharaoh and he essentially gave his wife to Pharaoh.

That's only a couple chapters ago. And now this. You know, the Lord could have easily looked at them and said, I have had enough of them. They have had enough chances.

But the Lord did not do that because that is not the heart of our Lord. Despite all that they did, the Lord did not cast them aside. And not only did the Lord not cast them aside to add to that, the Lord would still keep His promise to them going forward and give them their promised offspring.

So not only did the Lord not cast them aside for their sin, He would continue to use them going forward to achieve His great plans and purposes for them.

He would continue to keep His promise to them going forward. I think we're starting to see that this is a recurring theme in the life of Abraham. Abraham taking matters into his own hands, him making a mess of things, but then the Lord not casting them aside and still choosing to use him going forward.

[19 : 07] Isn't it good news that the Lord does not cast His people aside when we make mistakes? Isn't it good news that He still uses us even when we make mistakes?

This was good news for Abraham and Sarah and it is good news for us today. When we make mistakes, when we take matters into our own hands, we can't avoid the mess that that will bring and we should seek to try to avoid it because that mess does not honor the Lord.

But what an encouragement and a blessing it is that when we make mistakes, the Lord does not cast us aside and not only does He not cast us aside, He still wants us, He still loves us, and He still uses us.

What an encouragement it is that as believers, we have an ever-patient and gracious God who does not treat us how we deserve.

And that is really what I want to just encourage us all with this morning. That's what I want to kind of leave with the three girls who are getting baptized and all of us just to remember that in our mess, in our mistakes, as believers, we have an ever-patient and gracious God who does not treat us as we deserve.

[20 : 31] Instead, as His precious children, He loves us more than we could ever know and He will never cast us aside. His goodness and love will follow us all the days of our life, all because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

He gave His life for us on the cross so that when we turn to Him, we could be forgiven, we could be set free, we could be His forever. And because we are His, He will never, ever cast us aside.

He will never cast us aside. He will always hold us in His hands despite the mistakes and mess that we might make. Let's pray together.

Lord, when a door is closed, help us not to take matters into our own hands. Lord, help us not to force our own way in through the window, so to speak, just because we want something now.

Lord, help us not to do this. Help us to avoid those messes because we know those messes don't honor You. But Lord, we thank You so much that even when we do make mistakes, even when we do mess up, You will never, ever cast us aside.

[21 : 56] We know, Lord, that our sins, they are many, but Your mercy is more. We thank You for Your finished work on the cross when You paid the price in full for our sin, past, present, and future.

Lord, help us just to be so much more aware of Your grace and Your love and Your mercy for us. And pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.