

Genesis Ch16v1-16

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Date: 24 July 2022

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[0 : 00] It's a joy to be with you this morning. It's lovely to be able to open God's Word together and to consider all that he has to say to us. And both this Sunday and next we're going to be looking at two of the names of God that we find in the Old Testament, both of which appear in the record of the life of Abraham.

And today we're going to be looking at a story in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and in chapter 16. And to one couple, it appears as though God isn't doing anything at all. Yet someone else will discover that he is the God who sees everything. In fact, she will declare, you are the God who sees me.

In Hebrew it's pronounced El Roy, simply the God who sees. And like many stories in the Bible, it doesn't try to cover up the sins of the main characters, but instead it reveals more to us about the God whom we worship.

So let's read together from Genesis chapter 16. Now, Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

[1 : 14] But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar. So she said to Abram, the Lord has kept me from having children. Go sleep with my slave.

Perhaps I can build a family through her. Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten 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 Abram, 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, Abram said. Do with her whatever you think best. Then Sarai mistreated Hagar, so she fled from her.

[2 : 26] 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 am 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 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. 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 toward all his brothers. She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her.

You are the God who sees me.

[3 : 47] For she said, I have now seen the one who sees me. That is why the well was called Beer the Hoy Roy.

It is still there between Kadesh and Beret. So Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram gave him the name Ishmael to the son she had born.

Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael. So Father, we pray now that you would continue to speak these words by your spirit to our hearts so we might get a better view of who you are and that we might see clearly who we are.

And Father, where those things that we see would cause us to want to turn away and not to look, we pray, that you would help us to understand that you reveal our hearts so that we might turn to you and run to Jesus our Saviour.

And so Lord, do what you will in our hearts this day, I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It was about 30 years ago, but I still remember it so well.

[5 : 07] I woke up on Christmas morning with a throbbing pain in my mouth. I spent the day in bed feeling really miserable for myself while the rest of the family tucked into their Christmas dinner.

there was obviously no doctor or dentist open on that day. I couldn't face the thought of Christmas Day an accident and emergency. Thankfully, we knew someone who was able to give me some penicillin to get started, but it turned out it was an abscess and I was going to have to start a series of treatment at the School of Dentistry in Belfast for a number of months.

I arrived for one of those appointments, went to the reception desk, gave them my appointment card and took my seat. I had carefully counted the number of people before me just as you do to work out your place in the queue and I waited patiently for my turn.

But when it came to what I thought was my turn, someone else was called instead of me. My mistake, I thought, I'll just wait patiently.

But then someone else was called and then someone else and then someone else. It kept going on until even I realised that this was far too long to wait. I went up to the reception desk and asked, ever so politely, if I had been overlooked.

[6 : 31] Well, I'd been more than overlooked. My appointment card had been thrown in the bin and I've been sitting there all day with nobody to see me. You know, sometimes we can feel that way about God.

We have brought something to him. we have left it with him. We have waited patiently for him. And we've waited what we think is more than a reasonable period of time to wait on God's answer and it appears that God is doing nothing.

and we decide that we cannot wait any longer. That's how Sarai is feeling in Genesis 16.

God has promised to make Abram into a great nation with descendants that will outnumber the stars of the sky. But at this point in time it wouldn't take the whole weekend to do a stock take.

[7 : 40] The total is none. Not one child. Not even an expected child. And as time was passing by Sarai was giving up on any chance of giving birth.

She concludes that this God who made these promises is doing nothing and she cannot wait any longer.

So she hatches a plan. But it's a plan that lacks faith. The story is written so well that we are almost thinking Sarai's thoughts before her.

Verse 1 Now Sarai Abram's wife had borne him no children but she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar.

Now even if you've never heard this story before you already know what Sarai is thinking. Even if you're thinking no she can't do that.

[8 : 51] But verse 2 she said to Abram the Lord has kept me from having children go sleep with my maidservant perhaps I can build a family through her.

you see it's a plan that lacks faith because it is a plan that resists God. It appears here in the form of blame.

Look at what Sarai says in verse 2 the Lord has kept me from having children. She recognises that God is the author of her barrenness.

She knows that he is the source of all life and she knows that it is he who has withheld life. But Sarai will resist God's will.

She's determined to have a child and if God will not give her one she will do it herself. She puts it as plainly as that.

[9 : 53] Go sleep with my maidservant perhaps I can build a family through her. Do you hear those words? Perhaps I can build a family through her.

This will be Sarai's doing. She's not going to sit around any longer. Since God appears to be doing nothing well Sarai is going to do something.

It's a plan that lacks faith because first of all it resists God but it's a plan that lacks faith because it is completely Sarai's own doing.

Now you and I have no shortage of plans that lack faith. We can gamble in the hope of paying off debts. We can use alcohol to numb our pain.

We can alter tax returns so that we pay less than we should. We can enter into relationships and non-Christians because there seems to be no prospect of a Christian boyfriend or girlfriend.

[11 : 05] We can dress up our CV because we think that if we're truthful we're not likely to get that job. We have no shortage of plans that lack faith.

It isn't easy to trust God when he appears to do nothing. It can feel as though we cannot wait any longer and we hatch plans that lack faith.

In fact we do things that we know resist God and his purposes. We do things that we know are wrong but we do them anyway because it seems that it's the answer to the immediate problem that we face.

But these plans are not of faith. In fact they are faithless. It is Sarai who hatches the plan but we assume that Abram will not go along with it.

After all this is Abram the man of faith. This is Abram the friend of God. said. But we read in verse 3 Abram agreed with what Sarai had said.

[12 : 31] It's sadly reminiscent isn't it of another story the story of the fall itself. You remember that Eve took the fruit which had been forbidden to her and she gave it to Adam.

And what does Adam do? he takes and eats. He's without excuse. The Lord later rebukes him saying because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree.

You see behind the voice of Eve was the voice of the evil one. And behind the voice of Sarai was the voice of the evil one.

And both Adam and Abram should have recognized the real voice behind their wives words. You'll remember a time when Jesus recognized the voice of the evil one in the words of a close friend.

Jesus had just revealed to his disciples that death lay ahead of him. But you remember that Peter resists what Jesus says. Never Lord this shall never happen to you.

[13 : 44] And you know Jesus' response? Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block to me.

You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men. You see we need to learn to recognize the voice of the evil one when it comes to us through the words of others.

God maybe I should clarify just in case I misunderstood that it's not only through wives that the voice of the evil one can be heard.

It can come through husbands and children, parents and siblings, work colleagues and friends and we need to recognize it for what it is to learn to resist it as Jesus did no matter what the consequences may be.

This plan, this plan that lacked faith, was also a plan that lacked foresight. It's one of those plans that when later revealed you want to ask, what were you thinking?

[15 : 02] What were you thinking? We often ask our children that question, don't we, after they've done something foolish. what were you thinking? And the best defense I've ever heard from any of my children is simply this, I wasn't thinking.

But it's not only children whose plans lack foresight. We all get sucked into situations that resolve an immediate problem, only to create an even bigger one.

That's exactly what Abram does. He listens to Sarai, he takes Hagar as another wife, she becomes pregnant, and the result is conflict between Hagar and Sarai.

Well, who could have foreseen that? Well, anybody, anybody who has thought about it. Of course it would lead to tension in the family.

Of course Sarai would feel better that Hagar is able to give to Abraham what she could not. Of course Hagar would look down on Sarai. Anyone could have foreseen it, except those who weren't thinking.

[16 : 15] That's what happens when we resist God and when we hatch plans that lack faith. We think that God is not doing anything, and we act as though God does not see anything, but we discover from the rest of the story, that he is the God who sees everything.

You see, Abraham thought that by doing what Sarai wanted, he would at least enjoy some peace in the home. But there is more unrest than ever. She now starts blaming Abraham for the whole thing. It's all his fault. And Abraham pursues his desire of a quiet life by simply telling Sarai to do with Hagar as she sees fit. She begins to treat Hagar so badly that she cannot take it any longer, and she runs away.

But this is a God who sees everything. He sees our suffering, and he sees Hagar's suffering.

And not in a distant, far away sense, he sees our suffering in a very near sense. Look at verse 7. The angel of the Lord found Hagar.

[17 : 41] It suggests that he was looking for her. Not that God didn't know where she was, but that he sought her in her suffering. He had seen how Sarai had treated her.

He had seen how cruelly she had been treated, and he had seen her flee for safety. None of it had escaped God's notice.

Absolutely none of it, because he sees everything. We're inclined to think, aren't we, at times, that God doesn't really appreciate our suffering.

We feel that he has turned his back on us. In fact, it's as though he's able to block us out of his thinking completely.

because if he really saw what we were going through, he would surely do something about it.

[18 : 54] But all this time, he appears to do nothing. Yet he's the God who sees everything.

You remember when God sent Moses back to the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. He told him to bring God's words to the elders of Israel, I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you.

None of it had escaped God's notice. It appeared as though God was doing nothing, but he had seen it all. For 400 years it felt like God was unconcerned or unaware of the hardship that they faced.

But not one bit of their suffering had gone unnoticed by God. Not one bit.

And the same is true of you. Whatever you're facing at this time, whatever hardship you're having to endure, not one bit of your suffering goes unnoticed by the Lord.

[20 : 16] But God sees more than our suffering. God sees the attitudes of our hearts. Hagar has suffered terribly at Sarah's hand, heart.

But it didn't excuse the attitude of Hagar's heart. You remember that once she became pregnant she began to despise her mistress.

Now look at what God says to her in verse 9. Go back to your mistress and submit to her.

God had seen her suffering, suffering, but God did not remove her suffering. In fact, God sends her back to the place of her suffering.

Why? Because God is dealing with the attitude of Hagar's heart. See, sometimes, not always, but sometimes, God does not remove your suffering because he is more concerned with the attitude of your heart.

[21 : 34] Remember the apostle Paul three times prayed for something that he simply called the thorn in his flesh to be removed from him. But God said, no.

Instead, God promised that his grace would be sufficient for Paul. And Paul recognized that God had left him with this thorn in his flesh to protect him from pride.

Now, that must have been a tendency that Paul had come to recognize in himself. Paul knew how easily he could turn his spiritual experiences into a reason to boast and become proud.

God and he recognized his suffering as God's gracious gift to protect him from this tendency to sin that could have destroyed his life and his ministry.

God does indeed see our suffering, but he sees more than our suffering. He also sees the attitudes of our hearts.

[22 : 47] And sometimes he delays relieving us of our suffering so that he might address the deeper issues of our hearts. And in such circumstances that is not God's punishment of you, but God's gracious gift to you.

This God who sees our suffering and our attitudes also sees our fears. Hagar's position is a desperate one.

She is a slave who has run away from her mistress. She is a woman alone with no rights, no wealth, no security, no future.

In this culture, your children were your pension plan. They were your only hope for old age. And God assured Hagar that she will have a son.

He will make her descendants too numerous to count. God had seen her and God would provide for her. God knows God knows your fears about the future.

[24 : 07] God knows about those things that intrude into your sleeping hours and rob you of rest. God sees all of that and he can be trusted with all of that.

His answers are not always what we'd imagined. love and he would be a wild donkey of a man doesn't sound like anyone's dream of motherhood does it?

But he would provide security for her nonetheless. God has seen her vulnerable position, he knew her fears and he reassures her that he is in control of it all.

Her response is quite wonderful in verse 13 isn't it? She says you are the God who sees me. I have seen the one who sees me.

How wonderful is that? After all, who is Hagar? She's certainly not the main character in the story. She's not going to be the mother of the son that God had promised Abram.

[25 : 26] If you like, she's only a supporting actress, not part of the main cast. But God had seen her.

Do you feel that way at times? Who am I? Why would God be concerned about me? I'm not someone important.

I'm not going to do anything important. I'm nothing special. Well, this God who sees everything sees you.

He sees your suffering. He sees your attitudes. He sees your fears. He sees you.

Is it any wonder that Hagar responds as she does? God sees her. But not only does this God see her, she has seen the God who sees her.

[26 : 34] God has made himself known to her. And we too can know this God who knows us. How incredible is that?

God this same God who sent his angel to find Hagar would send his own son into the world so that he could make himself known, so that we could see the God who sees us.

In fact, we have a far clearer view of God than Hagar ever did. just as God sought for Hagar, Jesus came into this world to seek and to save the lost.

God did not stay distant from our suffering, but in his son entered into our world of suffering. God not only saw the danger that we were in, under his judgment for our sins, he sent his son to rescue us from the death that we deserve by his death on the cross.

Now, if God has done all of that for us, do you think that he doesn't see what you are going through right now?

[28 : 02] That he doesn't care? It may appear as though God is doing nothing, but Hagar has learned what Abram and Sarai had forgotten.

The one we worship is the God who sees me. Let's pray together. Father, even as we reflect on these words, we have to respond as David did that such thoughts are too wonderful for me.

To think that you see and know me. to think that the God who created the whole of the universe and sustains it by his powerful words at the same time is concerned about me.

Oh, how humbling a thought and how overwhelming to think of the love the heavenly father has for his children.

Father, we know that at different times your people are called to endure all kinds of hardship and suffering. Father, may we never be those who start to think that somehow you do not see or you do not care.

[29 : 42] But rather as we look to the fact that you gave your own son for us, may that assure us of your unchanging love towards your children and that even in our suffering your purposes are for our good.

Father, we thank you that you are not only the God who sees me but that we can see the God who sees us. Thank you that in the Lord Jesus you made yourself fully known that when we look to him we see the invisible God.

And Father, we pray then that you might draw out our hearts both in love for you and in confidence in you. And we ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Amen. in response to what we have heard together we're going to sing when I fear my faith will fail Christ will hold me fast.

It's an invitation to come and see the God who is faithful towards us who sees us and knows our need and is faithful. Let's stand together as we sing in response.