

Real Freedom and the Listening Lord

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Good morning, everybody. I'm Cheruba, and I lead the Women of Prayer Fellowship.

Today's lesson is taken from the Old Testament from the book of Genesis as printed in your liturgy. Now, Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children, 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.

[1 : 0 8] 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.

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert. It was a 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 took her. Go back to your mistress and submit to her. The angel said, 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.

[2 : 1 2] 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 Lahai Roy. 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. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever. Thanks, Truba.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Lord God, we pray that you would speak to us, convince us that you are the God who sees, that that would be a comfort to us, and that you would open our eyes to see as you see.

So Lord, be honored in the preaching of your word, and would your spirit move in this place. For Jesus' sake, amen. So I want to start with a personal question.

[3 : 20] The question is, have you ever felt utterly invisible and unable to do anything about it? Have you ever felt utterly invisible and unable to do anything about it?

Overlooked, unnoticed, unthought of, uncared for, perhaps even neglected and disregarded? Like the last player all the way at the end of the bench, the most expendable colleague, the least worthwhile person in the room.

Have you ever felt like no one cared about your story? Like no one ever noticed or considered the heavy things you might be carrying or even cared to know? And then have you ever felt so unseen that you've also wondered if you and your story were even insignificant and invisible to God?

As a church, we've been going through the first book of the Bible, Genesis. And in the past two weeks, our focus has been on this character, Abram, and God's special promise to him to make him a great nation, to use him to bless the world, to protect him, and to give him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

But while Abram does have a unique calling in God's redemptive story for the world, the teaching of Genesis from the very beginning was that actually every human being, not just Abram, is made in the image of God.

[4 : 34] Every one of us has a unique and valuable calling and purpose in the eyes of God. No one is insignificant. No one is invisible to God. And our text today, Genesis chapter 16, is a great example of this really revolutionary teaching in the Christian Scriptures.

It's a reminder that as important and blessed as Abram was, he wasn't the only one who had God's attention. He wasn't the only player that God intended to use for his purposes.

No, actually, in our text this morning, Abram actually plays a very, very passive background role while two women in his household, they take center stage. One, his barren wife, Sarai, and two, his wife's maidservant, Hagar.

And, you know, this is something that's incredibly unique about the Hebrew Scriptures compared to all other ancient Near Eastern literature. The story today begins with, and it features women, and not just as accessories to the male lead, but as incredibly significant characters in their own right.

See, unlike other ancient writings, the Bible actually gives remarkable attention to the voices and the agency and the emotions and the inner thoughts of multiple women, whether rich or poor, fertile or barren, slave or free.

[5 : 48] Women who would otherwise, and in every other culture and religion, be virtually invisible and insignificant. So as Genesis 16 distinctively and intentionally, like, shifts our focus from Abraham to the women in his life, God's Spirit is inviting us to open our eyes today, to hopefully see as God sees.

And I have four points this morning to help us see as God sees. The burden of barrenness, the cycle of sin, the sovereign who sees, and the glory of grace.

Right, so let's start with the burden of barrenness. Now, Genesis 16 starts with Sarai in verse 1 saying, Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And listen, that's not a throwaway detail here.

No, actually, that's basically her whole identity in the story of Genesis so far. When we first meet her, her whole identity in the story of Genesis is that she is barren.

We meet her all the way back in Genesis chapter 11, verse 30, and it goes out of its way to tell us, Now Sarai was barren. She had no child. This is the headline of her life, the ache she probably feels when she goes to bed at night and rises each morning.

[6 : 53] Up to this point in Genesis 16, all we know about Sarai are three things. She's Abram's wife. She's beautiful. Beautiful. And then three, the most prominent thing that we know about her, it's repeated twice, is that she's barren.

So here in chapter 16, it's ten years later from when we met her in chapter 11, and we're reminded once again she's still barren. That's the frame around her life, probably the lens through which she sees herself, through which everyone else sees her, beautiful but barren.

And not just barren as a biological fact, but to her social and psychological shame, even threatening her family's economic situation.

Remember, this was a culture where a woman's whole worth was tied to her ability to make babies, to produce more arrows for her husband's quiver, right? Barrenness wasn't just a private sorrow, it was a public shame.

When the text tells us that Sarai is barren, it is signaling to us that in the eyes of her society, perhaps even in her own eyes, she is a failure of a woman, providing far less value than what is expected of her.

[7 : 55] So put yourself in Abram and Sarai's shoes for a second. Abram, by the way, means exalted father, right? And Sarai means princess or noble lady, and yet this exalted father is childless.

And this princess, her life seems more like a nightmare than a fairy tale. Every day, their names probably reminded them of their barrenness, like a cruel joke that they could never escape.

And maybe you're thinking to yourself this morning, well, okay, I can see how that was sad for them, but also maybe some of us are, you know, modern Western folk, we're like, well, childlessness isn't so bad. My kid was a pretty tough one this morning, right?

It's not so bad. Or maybe you're thinking, well, I can see how barrenness was especially devastating in ancient times, but good thing we're living in the 21st century, right? But, you know, while we modern Western folks, we might think of barrenness differently today, though honestly, I know a lot of people in my life, actually, who do feel Sarai's pain, who wish that they could have children that they can't.

But even if that's not, you want to suggest that this discussion of Sarai's barrenness, it's still relevant for all of us, because, you know, regardless of whether or not you're infertile, what Sarai was really faced with in her society, it's something we're all faced with, is the question of whether or not we're enough.

[9 : 11] The question of whether or not we're bringing value to our families, to our society. For Sarai, barrenness meant she wasn't bringing value in the eyes of most people in her life. And while the goalposts may have changed thousands of years later, and while our standards and values might be different from the ancient Near East, has there ever been a culture that didn't have some kind of critical standard determining who in society brought value and honor and who brought liability and shame?

I was just speaking with a family last week who recently moved here from a place where it felt like people with special needs and disabilities were liabilities to be overlooked rather than valuable members of society.

Truly, every culture has its own definition of barrenness. We all feel the burden of barrenness in some way or another, don't we? In Sarai's world, barrenness meant no children, but in ours, barrenness might mean you're not attractive enough, you're not wealthy or accomplished enough, you don't have that picture-perfect, Instagram-worthy family.

See, every kingdom built by sinful human beings, every culture whispers, unless you have this, you're nothing. You're barren. And so Sarai's barrenness isn't just an ancient problem, it's our problem too.

We're all dealing with some kind of barrenness, some kind of deficit and lack that's keeping us from satisfaction, security, or some kind of salvation. And so the question for us is, what do we do with the burden of barrenness that we all feel?

[10 : 45] This brings me to my second point, the cycle of sin. And again, verse one tells us that Sarai had born no children, but it says what she did have was an Egyptian slave named Hagar.

In other words, she didn't have what she longed for, but she did have something, something she could use, someone she could use, someone vulnerable, over whom she could exert the little power that she did have.

She had an Egyptian slave. Now, if you were an Israelite listening to this origin story, you'd catch the irony immediately, right? Wait, Sarai had an Egyptian slave? That's what we were.

But apparently, before the Egyptians had Hebrew slaves, these Hebrews had an Egyptian slave. This was a reminder to Israel and all of us that the line between the oppressed and the oppressor in history is actually quite thin.

It can go back and forth quite easily. And so now, who was this Egyptian slave? Her name was Hagar, which literally means the immigrant, the sojourner.

[11 : 44] It's the same word that's used in the chapter before in Genesis 15. We looked at that last week when God reiterates His promise to Abram, but also mentions to him that His people are going to be strangers in a country not their own for 400 years.

That word strangers, it's the same word as the name Hagar. Strangers, sojourners, immigrants. And according to some Jewish traditions, in Midrash, Hagar may have even been a princess in Pharaoh's household, maybe even Pharaoh's daughter, which if you think about it, makes this even more tragic and twisted.

So now we have two princesses in this story, right? Both vulnerable in a patriarchal world, but instead of being allies, they become rivals in Abram's household, caught in a cycle of sin.

And it starts with Sarai, right? She's burdened with her barrenness, and yet she's unable to see herself in Hagar. She only sees Hagar as an object to be used, a tool to build her own family, a biotechnological object to deliver herself from the burden of her barrenness.

As the saying goes, right? Hurt people hurt people. Sarai couldn't see what she proposed to do to Hagar was the same thing that was done to her in Egypt.

[12 : 55] And in case you're not familiar with what I'm talking about, we didn't have time to go over this a couple weeks ago in Genesis chapter 12, but back in Genesis chapter 12, Abram and Sarah, they flee to Egypt because of a famine. And there, because of Abram's cowardice, because of his lack of faith and the promises of God, Abram, he lies, and Sarah is just his sister.

So his beautiful wife, she gets objectified, she gets taken into Pharaoh's harem, she's given over into another man's bed, basically. So like Sarah, you know, no one knew better than her the painful feeling of being trafficked, of being objectified by the powers that be.

And yet in her desperation, in her unbelief about the promises of God, in her unbelief regarding God's goodness, His power, His faithfulness, she takes matters, she takes Hagar into her own hands.

Verse 2. So she said to Abram, the Lord has kept me from having children. Literally, the Lord has restrained me, has limited me. In her mind, just like Eve's mind, the Lord is a prohibitive, restrictive God rather than a generous one.

So she says to Abram, go sleep with my slave, go depart from God's ideal in Genesis chapter 2 of a one husband, one wife, marriage, and family, go the polygamous way of Cain's descendants of Lamech, take another wife, go sleep with my slave, she says.

[14 : 16] She doesn't even mention Hagar's name because she's just an object to them. And perhaps, she says, maybe because it's all up to chance anyway, not God, perhaps we might get lucky going this alternative route.

Perhaps, she said, I can build a family through her. If you think that sounds funny, I can build a family through her. It is, but it's very intentional. That word build, it's the same word that's used when God built the first family in Genesis chapter 2, verse 22.

He took Eve from the side of Adam and he built that first family. But it's also the same word that's used when Cain's descendants defy God and build cities. It's also the same word that's used when the people at Babel build their city to sustain their own security.

All of them, Cain, the Babylonians, and now, even Abram's wife, they're all trying to build their way out of barrenness. And all these building projects, they depend on anything but the promises of God.

All of these building projects depend upon violence and harshness, oppression, rivalry, and selfishness. So verse 3 says, so after Abram 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.

[15 : 32] Does that language sound familiar to you? She took and she gave. Same as Genesis chapter 3. When Eve took and gave to Adam, the cycle of sin continues.

Abram is passive as Adam was. Abram takes a second wife like Lamech. Sarai repeats the oppression once done to her. And then verse 4 says, Abram slept with Hagar and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise or look down upon, even curse her mistress. So the cycle of sin continues. The oppressed Hagar, she's proved fertile. She's got some cards to play now.

And now she becomes the oppressor looking down on Sarai just as Sarai looked down upon her. Hurt people continue hurting people. And this creates more conflict in the household, verse 5, than 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. Just like Adam and Eve, right? Blame shifting.

[16 : 33] No one takes responsibility. Verse 6, your slave is in your hands, Abram said, not acknowledging that he got to have sex. He wasn't some passive actor here. He wasn't innocent. And then, just like Sarai, also treating Hagar as not, he just callously says, do with her whatever you think best.

And literally, in the Hebrew, it says, do what is good in your own eyes. Does that remind you of anything? Maybe of the fruit that was nice and pleasing to Eve's eyes.

Also, the book of Judges where the refrain of Israel's downfall is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Here, Abram, the father of our faith, he checks out, shrugs his shoulders and leaves the bearer of his firstborn child, he leaves her hanging.

And verse 6 ends, then Sarai mistreated Hagar, so she fled from her. It could also be translated, she afflicted Hagar. It's the same word that's used of how the Egyptians mistreated the Israelite slaves.

So do you see what this story is showing us? When we don't entrust our barrenness to God, when we refuse to trust in his timing and in his promises, when we take things into our own hands, we only perpetuate the cycle of sin that began long, long, long ago.

[17 : 51] We objectify others, we use them rather than love them, we misuse what little power we have, we look down on people, we see them as threats and rivals, we shift blame. And when it suits us, we escape into passivity, we shrug our shoulders and we think we're being so tolerant, we think we're being so chill and open-minded and we say, hey, just do whatever seems good in your own eyes.

But really, we're not doing anyone any favors, we're merely enabling the evildoers. When we, like Abram and Sarai, experiment with building our own ways out of barrenness, our pain and shame are only compounded and it spreads to hurt and enslave everyone around us, multiplying selfishness for generations upon generations.

You know, that might be the scariest part of all of this, the generational ripple effects of sin. We're still feeling Adam and Eve's today. So just as Adam and Eve thought that they were advancing humanity, Sarai, she thought she was solving her own barrenness problem, but her sin set in motion a rivalry, right?

Between Hagar's son, Ishmael, and her eventual son, Isaac, a rivalry that's lasted even to today between the Jewish and Arab peoples. So a question for us is have we reckoned with the implications, the consequences of our sinful patterns?

Have we considered their effect, not just on us, not just on our immediate neighbors, on our children and our neighbors and our children's children and our neighbors' neighbors? Our unbelief, our addictions, our short tempers, our selfishness, our prayerlessness, our greed, and lack of generosity.

[19 : 26] What are the vices that we are perpetuating in this world? And what legacy do we hope to pass on to the next generation? Christchurch, we need to deal with sin in our church.

As John Owen, the Puritan wrote, be killing sin or sin will be killing you. And listen, I'll be the first one to recognize that sin is complex and it often comes from a place of having been sinned against, right?

I'll be the first to agree that hurt people hurt people who hurt people and I know that many of us in this room, I'm the pastor of care here, I know that many of you are hurting, that you've been badly sinned against and that many, if not most, of our sin patterns are themselves ripple effects from the sins of those who've gone before us.

Trauma is real and it's devastating. Genesis 16 has taught us that. Hagar is its proof. She didn't ask for this story, she didn't choose it, she was taken and given over, she was used and then discarded, a traumatized victim of another traumatized victim and her whole life was undoubtedly shaped by this trauma and victimization just as many of your lives are indelibly marked by your own wounds.

But the danger, the danger in our current often trauma-obsessed cultural moment is that because trauma is real and because we long to be seen in our trauma, many of us can let our trauma take over our identity as if trauma is the truest, most important and most essential thing about us.

[20 : 58] And I want to be careful not to minimize the pain in this room or to suggest that we sweep our trauma just under the rug. I'm totally in favor of people working through their trauma, acknowledging it, naming it, lamenting it.

It's all definitely a part of healing and of being seen. But, if we believe in God's story about the world, if we believe that God's story isn't just creation and then fall and then, oh man, that really sucked, right?

If we believe that God's story is creation, fall, and then redemption, if we believe that Christ is risen as the first fruits of a new and incorruptible creation, then whatever your trauma, it is not, it must not, it cannot be your truest and final identity.

To let your trauma be your most significant identity is to say that the most significant part of a book is the problem and the conflict right in the middle of the story rather than the resolution.

what if our fixation on trauma actually comes from a deeper desperation of wanting someone to see us in it?

[22 : 11] Someone to notice, someone to care, someone to say, I see what happened to you, I see what you're carrying, and I feel for you, and I will never leave you nor forsake you. Maybe for some of us, airing our trauma, it feels like the only way will ever be seen.

Like if I can convince them of how terribly I've been wounded, then maybe, finally, people will have to see me. But don't you see what this is doing to us in our society?

How it's become a race to the bottom, people vying for power or credibility by showing that they've been more traumatized than others, everyone clamoring for a platform and fighting for visibility.

I love how one of my favorite thinkers, Alan Noble, puts it when he writes, everyone is on their own private journey of self-discovery and self-expression so that at times, modern life feels like billions of people in the same room shouting their own name so that everyone else knows they exist, to be recognized and to draw the gaze and the attention of others.

And then trauma sharing is quite a popular way to do this. And yet God's word here in Genesis 16 has better news for us, that we don't have to win the trauma Olympics to be seen.

[23 : 28] We don't need to out-suffer everyone else to be worthy of care and comfort. This brings me to the third point, the sovereign who sees. Verse 7 says, the angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert.

It was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. So Hagar has now fled into the wilderness and she's at a spring beside the road to Shur which indicates that she's fleeing south, probably back to Egypt.

And she's all alone and no one's come after her. Sarah's still hostile, Abram's still passive, but the sovereign Lord, he is neither hostile nor passive toward Hagar.

No, verse 7 says, the angel of the Lord comes after her. And by the way, this isn't just any angel, it's the same angel of the Lord who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. This is the Lord himself entering into creation to be present with his people.

And what's crazy is this is his first appearance to anyone in history, at least what's recorded in Scripture. This first person in Scripture to encounter the angel of the Lord.

[24 : 28] It isn't Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, it's not Moses, not some Jewish man. No, it's Hagar, an Egyptian slave girl who was used and abused by her masters.

And notice what he says in verse 8. He says, Hagar. He calls her by name, slave of Sarai. Where have you come from and where are you going? This is crazy, you know. Throughout the story, Abram and Sarai never speak Hagar's name.

They always refer to her as my slave, your slave, but God, he says Hagar. He knows her. He calls her by name. The first person in this entire narrative to call her by name, treat her like a person and not property.

And this is also the only known instance in all of ancient Near Eastern literature where a deity addresses a woman by name. The God of the Bible is a God who sees Hagar individually, personally, comprehensively, and compassionately.

He sees her and he dignifies her and he dignifies her, how? With a promise. Now think about that for a second. Think about what a promise is. A promise is a binding commitment.

[25 : 35] So here you have this slave girl who no one ever made a promise to. No one ever felt like they owed her anything, but the maker of heaven and earth, the I am, Yahweh, here, he is committing himself.

He is binding himself to her story by making a promise to her. And it's a promise that sounds a lot like it has the same scale as Abram's.

Verse 10, I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count. See, God is saying everyone else is trying to use you for their own plans to elevate themselves.

But Hagar, I have a plan to elevate you. Your child will be so much more than a trauma-born baby. Verse 11 through 12 detail how this child will not be forgotten.

This child will be strong and free, independent, and a force to be reckoned with. Hagar's son Ishmael, which means God hears, would be a reminder to her for the rest of her life that God has not shut his ears to her misery nor overlooked her affliction.

[26 : 38] And so impactful, so transformative is this moment. Look how Hagar responds. Verse 13, it's one of the most remarkable verses in the entire Bible. It says, she gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her.

You are the God who sees me. Did you know that this is the only place in all of Scripture where a human being gives God a name?

Normally, it's some higher authority that's supposed to bestow a name, right? But here, Hagar is giving God a name, and not because she's higher, but because she's humbled and she's bearing witness to his character.

She names him El Roy, which means the God who sees me. In verse 13, it literally says, she is calling upon the name of the Lord just like the descendants of Seth.

She's naming him according to her experience of him. The God who personally found her when she was lost and miserable. The God who called her by name and promised her a better tomorrow.

[27 : 36] This overwhelms her. Like, have I actually just right here gazed upon the one who gazes upon me? Hagar is blown away. She is transformed by this encounter with the sovereign who sees, precisely because he's the sovereign who sees her, her of all people.

A well is even dedicated by her to this remarkable moment, Bir Lahoy Roy, which means well of the living one who sees me, and so transformative is this moment for her that she is even willing to heed and obey the Lord's command to her in verse 9 to go return to her mistress and even submit to her is what it says.

And listen, this is not a prescriptive story. This is a descriptive one. This isn't God saying you should go back to return to those who abuse you, but it is a story telling us that sometimes God has a better plan than what we think.

God has a distinct and unmistakable plan for Hagar, and Hagar believes it having seen the one who sees her. And my question is, is this how you understand?

Is this how you view God as El Roy, the God who sees you, as the God who sees all your tears, hears your cries, who observes all your affliction? Have you experienced him in this way?

[28 : 53] Would you dare believe this about him? My really good friend, author, biblical counselor, her name's Esther, she puts it this way, the story of Hagar throws us off because it expands the scope of who matters to God.

We're not sure we expect God to inscripturate this story for all eternity, but he does care about this seemingly insignificant character, maybe in part to confound our notions of who he cares about, who he sees.

God cares about people we're not sure he would care about, and we find hope that maybe his watchful regard is for us too. This is a word to the Hagers in the room, those of us who feel unseen, unnoticed, and unhopeful.

But get this, this is also a word to the Sarai's and the Abram's in the room. The God who saw Hagar's suffering also saw Abram and Sarai's sin. He sees both the oppressed and the oppressor, victims and the victimized.

That's a word for us too. The sovereign who sees is both comforting and terrifying at the same time. But what's even more beautiful than God simply seeing is that this isn't just God's mind being like a massive data collector, right?

[30 : 03] When Hagar is calling upon the name of the Lord as the God who sees, she's not marveling at God's knowledge simply about her. But she's marveling that he knows her, that he gets her, that he's tenderly present and attentive to her and powerfully working in her life.

And this doesn't mean he just snaps his fingers to transform all her circumstances around her, right? Sarai's still hostile. Abram's no advocate. God seeing Hagar doesn't mean giving her exactly the kind of story she'd write for herself.

No, he's too wise. He's too good to do that for her or for any of us. But what the sovereign seeing God does mean is that the sovereign maker, the sustainer, the maker of heaven and earth does not find it too lowly to bend down low and to personally and privately assure us one-on-one, I see you.

I hear you and I will not abandon you. My promises are sure. He assures Hagar that her future isn't determined by Sarai's spitefulness or Abram's apathy nor even by her own trauma.

Her future and ours are sure just because God says. They're sure according to the word and promise of the God who sees us. And this is what helped Hagar to live another day.

[31 : 19] And this is what we can all find help from to live a new day as well. When we're tempted to believe that our stories are too broken, not worth living on, because of the people who hurt us, the failures that haunt us, the burdens that weigh us down, God says, no, I see you.

I hear you and your story isn't invisible to me. Let my promise sustain you. Let my promise have the final word and not your pain. And my question for us this morning is do you think you could believe that?

Do you think you could believe that? Do you want to believe that? Do you want to live as though God's good promises were true for you and for those around you?

Here in Genesis 16, Sarai couldn't and neither could Abram, but Hagar, she could believe that. When Sarai and Abram lived by technique and human strategy rather than trusting the promises of God by faith, they chose to live by human ingenuity.

Rather than by divine grace. And this is where we'll land the plane. You see, Genesis 16 isn't just a touching story about how God sees the underdog in Hagar. It's a story of the transformative power and the glory of grace.

[32 : 32] So powerful was God's gracious encounter with Hagar. So convincing was His gracious promise to her. Seeing the one who saw her transformed how she saw her own circumstances. It was no longer a choice between living under the empire of Sarai and living under the empire of Egypt.

The choice was now between the gracious plan and kingdom of God and everything else. The choice was now between depending completely on God to show up for her, to see her, to meet her, to provide for her, or depending completely on someone else or something else to show up for her and to meet her and to provide for her.

Grace gave her the strange freedom of entrusting herself to the goodwill and pleasure of God instead of having to engineer her own salvation as Sarah was trying to do for herself.

The glory of grace is that we don't have to bear the burden of our barrenness any longer. The glory of grace is we don't have to build our way out of barrenness ourselves.

So ironically, Hagar, the slave girl, the one Abram and Sarah used to try to expedite the plans of God. Hagar returns from the wilderness. She turns away from Egypt.

- [33 : 47] She gives birth to Ishmael whose name again means God hears and thus Hagar becomes a sign and a reminder to the people of God, to Sarah and to Abram of the way God graciously fulfills his promises.

For every time Sarah and Abraham would hear Ishmael's name, they would be reminded of the way that they pursued their own salvation by works of the flesh rather than calling upon the name of the Lord who hears and actually are encountering the good and gracious living God as Hagar had.

Hagar and Ishmael were a reminder to Abram and Sarah that the promises of God will not be expedited nor engineered to fulfillment but only divinely delivered by grace.

And that's the gospel. That we cannot save ourselves but God. And we've beheld an even fuller picture of this God than Hagar who met the angel of the Lord.

We met him in Christ. For God has not merely come to us as an angel but as Jesus Christ the Son in the flesh. He's the one the angel of the Lord was pointing to who is not only the sovereign who sees he wasn't just the one who saw the Samaritan woman at another well but he's the Savior who suffers.

- [35 : 02] Like Hagar he moved back toward those who afflicted him out of faith in the promises of God and perhaps better than Hagar out of love for those who'd crucify him.

So what do we do with this? Well like Hagar we should bear witness. We should bear witness to what we've seen to the one who's seen us and better yet to the one who's saved us.

That was Hagar's gospel. That was her good news her testimony that she saw the one who saw her. So what's your good news? What's your gospel?

What's your testimony about how God has saved you from having to save yourself? This is my practical challenge to all of us to help others see the God who sees and saves us.

Let's pray. Lord convince us of our barrenness and our inability to bear that burden.

- [36 : 05] Save us, deliver us from the cycle of sin. Oh God convince us that you are the God who sees. Lord lift up our eyes to the glory of your grace in Jesus Christ.

We ask in his name. Amen.