

God's Promise Kept

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[0 : 0 0] You can tell that we've been in this series a long time. Yesterday I was doing family Bible time with the kids and we were reading the story of the Garden of Eden, a really famous story, and I said, oh, God said to Abraham and Eve instead of Adam and Eve.

I don't think that's accurate in the Bible, no. We've been looking at Abraham for a long time. He gets in your thinking. And the trouble with a long time is the wait.

You see, we're not a patient culture. We're a while-you-wait culture. So shoes fixed, keys cut while you wait. Finance approved, health results while you wait.

Have you ever been to VicRoads? Guy Manuel has, I know he has. Have you been to VicRoads or that deli at Woolies and you take a ticket? You take a ticket and you look up on the screen.

It says, now serving, number 20. And you look at your ticket. It's ticket 50. Unbelievable. We hate waiting. Internet shopping companies, they're desperate to provide one thing.

[1 : 1 0] It is same-day delivery. If you can provide same-day delivery, you'll make a billion dollars. But God is not a same-day delivery God.

But he does deliver. And straight into it, this is our first point today. You see, he promised Abraham offspring back in chapter 12, which we did in June.

Abraham was 75 years old. In chapter 16, Abraham was 86 years old. And his wife, Sarah, grew tired of waiting.

And so she took matters into her own hands. She made Abraham sleep with Hagar, the slave woman. And little Ishmael was born. They wouldn't wait on God's promises.

In chapter 17, Abraham is 99 years old. And offspring, a baby at his age, has now become a laughing matter. But God still asks him to wait.

[2 : 1 4] And until chapter 21 today, all Abraham has is a promise. That's all he's got, a promise. A promise is good. But eventually, even God has to deliver.

And so finally, finally, in our passage today, verse 5, Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

And we shouldn't be surprised, actually. You will have to wait. But God will deliver. He will keep his promises. He's not a same-day delivery God.

But he does what he says. This emphasis can be seen in our first few verses. I'm going to read it again with emphasis. Listen out. Now, the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said.

And the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the very time God had promised. You see, we're not to confuse the way God gives Abraham a son with the way Sarah tried to force it.

[3 : 2 3] The other emphasis is how impossible this baby is. Listen again. Now, the Lord was gracious. Isaac is a gift from God.

Gracious gift. Verse 2, Abraham is in his old age. And then in verse 5, Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Isaac's name means he laughs, which is poignant because Abraham and Sarah laughed at the idea of a child. They laughed in disbelief.

There's no way. But today their laughter comes from joy and amazement. Verse 6, Sarah said, God has brought me laughter.

And everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. And she added, verse 7, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Who would have said?

[4 : 1 8] God did. Pregnant at her age? She was 90. Pregnant at her age? Laughably impossible. But not for God, who alone delivers little Isaac, just as he said.

This isn't a moral lesson for if you want something, just pray for it. And if you wait a long time, you'll get it. God will deliver. That is not what this passage is about. God has made no promises about pregnancies or our families or our health.

These things are not in view. God's promises to Abraham are nothing less than a totally new world. A new people in a new place with God dwelling with them in close relationship.

And the first step is the arrival of the promised son. Isaac is the first brick, if you like. The first brick God is laying in his plan.

And we'll see another one in our passage today. You see, the Old Testament is full of promises made and then promises kept. God does just as he says.

[5 : 33] And so through Moses, he provides an impossible rescue to his people, just as he said. Through all the prophets, he loosens Israel's grip on this world.

Through exile, he promises it. It happens just as he said. And then after an entire Old Testament of waiting, Jesus, the promised son, arrives, just as he said.

Also an impossible birth by a virgin, remember? He pays for our sins. He rises to new life. He inaugurates this new creation.

A new people in a new world living with God. This is the gospel. This is the gospel. First preached to Abraham thousands of years earlier.

The first brick of which is little Isaac. Today, in 2018, we are waiting on Jesus again. He's going to come.

[6 : 34] He's going to judge the world. He's going to take us home. God takes his time. But he's not a same-day delivery God.

But he does deliver. And while you wait, while you wait, if you're going to laugh, make it a laugh of disbelief and incredulity. But a laugh of joy?

Verse 7. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Who would have said? No one. But God did. At their age, it happened.

Just as he said. And the trouble with God doing things in his time and not our time in this while you wait culture is we're so tempted to take matters into our own hands.

And this is our second point. You see, that's what you do. When people take too long, you take matters into your own hands. Say, I'm going to do it myself. And we see the dangers of that in this point here, in our story.

[7 : 39] So Abraham now has two boys, but their only difference is who their mothers are. So two boys with different mothers. So Isaac is the boy of promise.

His mother is Sarah, Abraham's wife. Ishmael, we're told, Ishmael is the other boy. His name is deliberately left out of this whole chapter, even by God.

His mother is Hagar. She is Abraham's slave. Our author is creating a gulf between these two boys based on who their mothers are.

And you can listen out for the emphasis of Sarah's sort of motherhood. I'm going to read verses one to seven. I'll skip a few. Now, the Lord was gracious to Sarah and the Lord did for Sarah.

Verse two, Sarah became pregnant and bore a son. Verse three, Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. And then verses six and seven told from the perspective of Sarah.

[8 : 43] Sarah said, God has brought me laughter. And everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. And she added, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?

Yet I have born him a son in his old age. This may be why to this day, if someone wants to claim Jewish heritage, only their mother needs to be Jewish.

Maybe that's the case. No, soon as Isaac is born, then the threat arrives, though. Verse eight. The child grew up and was weaned. And on the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast.

Back in their culture, when infant mortality was quite high, if your baby reached weaning age, which I think is about, let's say it's two years old, you would have a great feast to celebrate.

I think the fact that your baby didn't die, which is quite sad. But that's what they used to do. But verse nine. Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had born to Abraham was mocking.

[9 : 41] Ishmael was mocking Isaac. Ishmael is a teenager now. And like everyone else, when he sees Isaac or he laughs, he laughs.

But the translation in verse nine is mocking. This seems to be some sibling rivalry. Did you have sibling rivalry in your house growing up? I see some boys at the back.

Did you have sibling rivalry in your house growing up? To say that there was sibling rivalry in my house would be the understatement of the century. My wife, Rachel, she's one of seven from Tasmania.

She's not. She's not here. They're not here. My wife, my wife, Rachel's one of seven. To this day, they all get on like a house on fire. They actually want to spend time with each other.

It's unbelievable. When she hangs out with my family, she's sort of cowering in fear. She thinks we're all shouting at one another. And I say, no, no, that's just how we talk to each other. Ishmael's mocking is no mere sibling rivalry.

[10:46] He's bragging. He's bragging about being the firstborn son. He's not a nice boy, actually. We knew this when we first met him. So please, Barry, could I have the first slide?

There you go. This is when we first met Ishmael. This is what God says about him. He will be a wild donkey of a man. So stubborn, hard to get along with. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him.

And he will live in hostility toward all his brothers. Thanks, Barry. So Sarah sticks up for Isaac in verse 10, sticks up for her little boy.

And she said to Abraham, verse 10, get rid of that slave woman and her son. That woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son. You see, Ishmael's mom is Abraham's slave.

But Isaac's mom is Abraham's wife. Suddenly, Ishmael is relegated. He's lost all his privileges of being the firstborn son.

[11:53] He is jealous and he opposes his brother, just as God said. And so if you can, Paul picks up this tension in our second reading, which is Galatians.

If you can, can you keep your finger in Genesis and flick over to our second reading, Galatians? Let me read from verse 22. For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.

His son by the slave woman, that's Ishmael, was born according to the flesh. But his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. That's Isaac. And Paul says in verse 24, these things are being taken figuratively.

The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves. This is Hagar. Now, Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia.

You see, you remember that that's where God first gave Moses the Ten Commandments, his law. Ishmael represents the law. That is, trying to inherit God's blessings by keeping laws, by doing good.

[13:04] Paul calls it according to the flesh, by your human efforts. Whereas Isaac is the opposite. His birth, as the end of verse 23 says, is entirely the result of a divine promise.

He was born by impossible human effort. Born by God. A gift from God, he is. Two boys, different mothers, radically different ways to approach God.

And so Ishmael is offended. And he mocks his brother. Paul says in verse 29, at that time, the son born according to the flesh, Ishmael, persecuted the son born by the power of the spirit.

That's Isaac. And he says it's the same now. Paul says this sibling rivalry is no sort of one-off family scuffle. It is a general principle. It's the same now.

People, people persecute Isaacs. People persecute Christians. In Galatians, religious people in that book, they're running around saying, If you really want to be children of Abraham, what you've got to do is keep the law.

[14:19] So go out and get circumcised. They were telling these people. They were preaching human effort. You must do this stuff and then you can be inheritors of God's blessings.

It is the same now. Roman Catholicism says that our good works contribute to our salvation. Not every Catholic believes this.

Lots of Catholics trust only in Jesus. But it's the official position of the church. Nominal liberal Christianity says it's our good deeds.

And if we are decent, then God will and should accept us. Actually, the bloke on the street says the same thing. If you're good to people, if you try hard, God will and should accept you.

That is being an Ishmael, says Paul. Imagine if you said to an Ishmael, to a bloke on the street, imagine if you said, you know what, you need to trust in Jesus, the promised son to be saved.

[15:23] And they say, why? I'm a decent person. I don't hurt anyone. I've been baptized. I was confirmed. My parents are Anglicans. But Isaacs believe your religious performance, your decency

doesn't get you anywhere with God.

And so they say, are you saying that I'm not good enough for him? We say, yes. That's exactly what I'm saying. It's offensive to say you can't be good enough for God.

Imagine if you then turn around and say, oh, we are good enough. And then they say, well, why should God accept you? You are no different to me. And that is true, isn't it? We're no different. But we are trusting in Christ. And so God accepts us completely. We are full children and full inheritors of Abraham's blessings.

How arrogant, they say. Why do you Christians and only you Christians get to God? It's offensive. And just as Ishmael mocked and persecuted Isaac, so others will mock and persecute Christians.

[16:34] Maybe you have experienced this in your life. It's offensive to say that people can't save themselves. People persecute Christians.

People mock Christians. Because Christians aren't busy accumulating sort of blessings in this life now. They are waiting on God. If you're not a Christian, and there'll be a few in a room this size. If you're not a Christian, maybe you think you're good enough. Or if you're good enough, God will accept you. Here is the warning. It will not happen.

You will not inherit. It is only through what God has done for you as Jesus dies for sins and rises to new life.

And so please turn back to Genesis. Page 19, if you've lost it. Page 19. Genesis 21. Page 19, Genesis 21.

[17:42] Sarah sees her boy getting mocked. And she says, verse 10, Get rid of that slave woman and her son. For that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son.

God agrees with Sarah. And they get rid of Ishmael. Abraham is distressed. He loves Ishmael. He's upset by the family breakdown. Ishmael is still his son after all.

But God says, do not be so distressed. Verse 12. Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

Two radically different ways to approach God. Works of the law, good deeds, human performance. God says, get rid of that. The other, which God sides with.

The other is trusting in the promises of God. The promised son of God. Jesus. He is the better Isaac. God does go on to look after Ishmael.

[18:42] In verse 13, he says, I will make the son of the slave into a nation also. Because he is your offspring. That is what the rest of the passages are about. He is looking after Ishmael.

He gives him a wife and a land. He raises him up. But Ishmael was never part of the plan. God graciously cleans up the mess of Abraham and Sarah.

And he looks after Ishmael. You see, God is preparing the way for his big plan to start. He prepares the way for Isaac alone to inherit by getting rid of Ishmael.

That's offspring. Over the page in the next story, we won't read it. He prepares the way for a promised land. King Abimelech recognizes that God is with Abraham in everything he does.

And so Abimelech wants to make a treaty with him. There's a bit of to-ing and fro-ing. And eventually Abraham gets a well. A well is not a lot.

[19:44] But like Isaac's birth, it is a first step, a first brick of the promised land. Isaac took 25 years to arrive. The promised land will take well over 400 years.

But God has laid the first brick. It's a well. But his people will have to wait. Just please, Barry, the second slide. There it is.

Yep. This is what it says in verse 33. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba. A tamarisk tree for the- I didn't know this. I had to look this up. A tamarisk tree is a massive evergreen tree in the desert.

And it's like Abraham is planting a flag for God in the promised land. It says there that he called on the name of the Lord, the eternal God.

There's a hinting there that God doesn't count time the way we do. He is eternal. And then it says Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

[20:47] For a long time yet, the Philistines will occupy this land. It'll be a long time before Abraham's descendants get vacant possession. He's not a same-day delivery God.

But he does deliver. Thanks, Barry. God promises to us that Jesus will return. He will make a totally new world.

And so far, he's taken 2,000 years. And still nothing. It is tempting to take matters into our own hands.

I'm tired of waiting for God's blessings. I think I'll make some of my own. I'm tired of waiting for God. I will trust in someone else or something else for blessings.

It is easy to be Ishmael's while you wait. It's tempting to think that our assurance of heaven comes by our decent and moral behavior.

[21 : 46] In our religious law-keeping, our church attendance even. The warning from verse 10, Get rid of that slave woman and her son. For that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son.

Get rid of that Ishmael thinking, says God. Or you will never share in the inheritance of the promised son. Get rid of that Ishmael thinking. You are children of the free woman.

God warns we will not inherit blessings Ishmael's way. Jesus has taken so long to arrive. How are we going to remind ourselves while we wait?

Promises are good. Promises from God are great. But eventually even God will have to deliver. And until chapter 21, all Abraham had was a promise.

But in our passage today, the first bricks are laid. The impossible birth of Isaac happens, just as God said.

[22 : 51] He's given a well in the promised land, just as God said. These are bricks and they happen. And so we can look back on the birth of Jesus.

His death and resurrection, not just words, but the biggest of bricks. They are promises kept, just as God said. So let's pray.

Our Father God, we are so impatient and you take forever. Please help us to wait on you. Help us trust that when you say things, they happen just as you say.

As we wait, Father, please help us get rid of the Ishmael thinking that we can achieve blessings for ourselves, that our performance counts for anything.

Please help us wait for the Lord Jesus, remembering that he's already died and risen. He's already arrived once. We ask these things in his name. Amen.