

God's Promise Kept

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Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] You can tell we've been in this series quite a long time because yesterday we were doing family Bible time with the kids. And it was the famous story of the Garden of Eden.

And I said, oh, God said to Abraham and Eve. Yeah, it should be Adam and Eve, but I said

Abraham and Eve. There you go. We've been in this series quite a long time.

Abraham gets in our thinking. And the trouble with a long time is the wait. We're not very good at waiting. We're an impatient 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 or to the deli at Woolies? And you take that ticket and you look up on the board thing and it says now serving number 20. And you look at your ticket, you got 51.

[0 : 55] And you're thinking, oh, we're not very good at waiting, are we? All internet shopping companies are clamoring to get same day delivery.

If you can provide same day delivery, you'll make millions. God is not a same day delivery God. But he does deliver.

And this is our first point. We're going to get straight into it. So he promises Abraham offspring in chapter 12 when Abraham was 75 years old.

In chapter 16, Abraham is 86 years old. His wife, Sarah, grew tired of waiting. And so she took matters into her own hands. She makes Abraham sleep with Hagar, the servant.

And then little Ishmael is born. They wouldn't wait on God's promises. In chapter 17, Abraham is 99 years old. And now a child at his age has become a laughing matter.

[2 : 00] But God still asks him to wait. And until chapter 21 today, until today, all Abraham has is 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 Isaac was born to him. And we shouldn't be surprised, really.

You will have to wait, but God will keep his promises. He's not a same-day delivery God, but he does deliver. He keeps his word. And this is the emphasis in the first few verses.

I'm going to read it again with some emphasis. 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 him. And we're not to confuse the way God brings about Abraham's son with the way Sarah tried to do it.

[3 : 05] That's the other emphasis in this passage. How impossible Isaac's birth is. So verse 1, the Lord was gracious to Sarah. So Isaac is entirely a gift from God.

Verse 2, we're told that Abraham was in his old age. And then verse 5, that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Isaac's name means he laughs.

And that is poignant because Abraham and Sarah laughed at the idea of a child. They laughed in disbelief. 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, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?

Who would have said? God did. God said. Pregnant at her age? Laughably impossible. But not for God who alone delivers little Isaac.

[4 : 11] Just as he said. Now this is not a moral lesson for if you want something, you pray for it. You wait and then you'll get it. Family health.

Our own pregnancies. Not mine. But health as well. Family troubles. God has made no promises about these things. God's promises to Abraham are nothing less than a totally new world.

A new people in a new place. God dwelling with them in close relationship. And the first step is the arrival of the promised offspring.

Isaac, he's the first brick, if you like. The first brick in God's new construction plan. We're going to see another brick as we go through our passage. And in the Old Testament, it's full of promises made and then promises kept by God.

God does just as he says. So God rescues his people Israel, impossibly in fact, from Egypt, just as he said. Through the prophets, God loosens Israel's grip on this world through exiling them.

[5 : 23] And it happens just as he said. And then after an entire Old Testament of waiting, Jesus arrives, just as God said. Also an impossible birth to a virgin, remember?

He pays for our sins. He rises to new life. He inaugurates a new people in a new place dwelling with God. This is the gospel. First preached to Abraham thousands of years before Jesus.

The first brick is little Isaac. Today here in 2018, we are waiting for Jesus to return, to judge the world, to take us home to the new creation.

God takes his time. 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, a laugh of incredulity.

But a laugh of joy? Verse 7. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children pregnant at her age? It happened.

[6 : 37] Just as God said. But you see, the trouble with God taking his time, especially in a while-you-wait culture, is that 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 step in and you do it yourself. That's how Ishmael was born in the first place, remember? And we see the dangers of this back in our story.

So now, Abraham has two boys, and their difference is who their mothers are. Two boys, different mothers. So Isaac, he's the boy of promise.

His mother is Sarah's wife, Abraham's wife Sarah. The other boy, whose name is deliberately left out of this whole chapter, even by God, that other boy, his mother is Hagar the Egyptian.

She is Abraham's slave. Our author is creating a gulf between these two boys based on who their mothers are. And you can hear the emphasis of Sarah's motherhood in verses 1 to 7.

[7 : 49] I'll just paraphrase it. So verse 1, Now the Lord is gracious to Sarah. And then, And the Lord did for Sarah. Verse 2, Sarah became pregnant and bore a son.

Verse 3, Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. And then, Verses 6 to 7 are told from the perspective of Sarah. 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 borne him a son in her old age?

This may be why, this may be why today, if someone wants to claim Jewish heritage, they only need a Jewish mother. It may be the case. And no soon as Isaac is born, then a threat arrives.

Verse 8, The child grew up and was weaned. And on the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast. Back in those days, because infant mortality was so high, if your child lived until toddler age, which, let's say it's about two years old, they had a great feast for you.

[8 : 57] And so today is Isaac's feast. Verse 9, But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking.

The first son, Ishmael, that other son, he's a teenager now. And like everyone else, when he sees Isaac, or he laughs, he laughs.

But the translation you have in your Bibles is, he mocks. There seems to be some sibling rivalry here. Did you have sibling rivalry in your house growing up? To say there was sibling rivalry in my house would be the understatement of the century.

My wife, Rachel, she's one of seven from Tasmania. And, sorry. She can't get me. She's in the cry room. My wife, Rachel, she's one of seven.

And to this day, all her brothers and sisters, they all get along like a house on fire. I mean, they actually want to spend time with each other. It's unbelievable. And when she comes to our place and hangs out with my family, she thinks we're all shouting at one another.

[10 : 01] And I say, no, no, that's just how we talk. But Ishmael's mocking, Ishmael's mocking is no mere sort of sibling rivalry.

He's bragging. He's bragging about being the firstborn son, the inheritor of all Abraham's blessings. He lords it over little Isaac.

He's not a nice boy. And we knew this when we first met Ishmael. So please take the slide. This is what God says when Ishmael first comes around.

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. Thank you, Tech.

And so Sarah sticks up for her son, Isaac. She says, verse 10, she said to Abraham, get rid of that slave woman and her son. That woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son, Isaac.

[11:00] You see, Ishmael's mum is Abraham's slave, but Isaac's mother is Abraham's wife. Suddenly, Ishmael is relegated.

He is losing his firstborn son's privileges. He is jealous and he opposes his brother, just as God said. And Paul picks up this tension in our second reading.

So can you do me a favor? Please stick your finger in Genesis 20. Keep it there, because we'll come back to it, and turn to Galatians 4. It's on page 1170. So stick your finger in Genesis.

We'll come back there. But just turn for a moment to Galatians 4. So I'll read from verse 22 of our reading. 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, Ishmael, was born according to the flesh. But his son by the free woman, Isaac, was born as the result of a divine promise.

[12:04] 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'll remember that is where God first gave Moses the Ten Commandments, his law.

Hagar's son represents God's law or trying to inherit the blessings through God's law by keeping the Ten Commandments, by doing good, by human effort, as Paul puts it, according to the flesh.

In fact, Ishmael's own birth was a forced human effort. Isaac is the opposite. Isaac's birth, as the end of verse 23 says, was the result of a divine promise.

Impossible by human effort. He's entirely a gift from God. Two boys, different mothers, radically different ways to approach God.

[13:13] And so Ishmael is offended and he mocks his brother. And Paul says, at that time, the son born according to the flesh, Ishmael, persecuted, is the language, persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit, Isaac.

Paul says, it's the same now. Paul says, this sibling rivalry is no mere one-off family scuffle. It's the same now. It's a general principle.

People persecute Isaacs or Christians. In Galatia, religious people are running around to the churches saying, if you really want to be children of Abraham, you've got to keep these works of the law.

You've got to get circumcised. They were preaching human effort. Do this and you'll be an inheritor of God's blessings. It is the same now.

It's the same now. Roman Catholicism says, our good works contribute to our salvation. Not all Catholics believe this. Both my grandmothers were Catholics.

[14:20] They loved Jesus wholly. But this is the official position of the church. Nominal liberal Christianity says the same thing. If you're good and if you're decent and if you work really hard, God will and should accept you.

Actually, people on the street, even people on the street say that. They say, if you work hard and are good to people, if you don't hurt anyone, then God would and should accept you.

That is being an Ishmael, says Paul. Can you imagine saying to an Ishmael, can you imagine saying, you need to trust in Jesus, the promised son to save you.

Why, they say, I'm decent enough. I'm a good person. I've been baptized or I was confirmed. My parents are Anglicans. Pretty good. But Isaacs believe that our religious performance doesn't count anything towards God.

It doesn't get us anywhere with God. Are you saying that I'm not good enough for him? Yes. That's exactly what I'm saying. You see, it's offensive to say you can't be good enough for God.

[15:33] Imagine if you then add in, oh, yeah, but we are good enough for God. They say, why should God accept you? You're no better than me. And that is true.

But we are trusting in Christ. We trust in Jesus. And so God accepts us completely. We are full children, full inheritors of Abraham.

How arrogant, they say. Why should you Christians and only you Christians get to God? It's offensive. And just as Ishmael persecutes Isaac, so people will persecute Christians. Maybe you've experienced this in a room this size that's bound to be the case. It's offensive to say that people can't save themselves. People persecute Christians. People mock Christians because Christians aren't busy accumulating a world full of blessings for themselves. They are waiting on the Lord. If you're not a Christian, maybe you think that you are good enough or that if you are good enough, God will accept you.

[16 : 43] Here is the warning. It will not happen. You will not inherit. It's only through what God has done for you in Jesus as he dies and rises to pay for our sin to make us new.

And so, turn back to Genesis 21, please. Turn back to Genesis 21 on page 19. So, Sarah sees her boy getting mocked and persecuted and so in verse 2 she sticks up for her son. Get rid of that slave woman and her son for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac. And God agrees with Sarah and they get rid of Ishmael and Hagar. Abraham is distressed in verse 11. It's his son after all. He loves his son. He's distressed by the family breakup. And so, in verse 12 God says, do not be 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 efforts.

[18 : 01] The other, 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.

In verse 13 he says, I will make the son of the slave into a nation also because he is Abraham's offspring. And that's what the rest of those verses are about till verse 21. Ishmael was never part of God's plan, but God graciously cleans up the mess of Abraham and Sarah and he looks after Ishmael. Right until his whole life he's given a wife and a family. But what's happening is God is preparing the way for his big plan. He prepares the way for Isaac alone to inherit blessings by getting rid of Ishmael. That's offspring. And then over the page, we don't have time to read it, but over the page he prepares the way for a promised land. Abraham goes into the territory with King Abimelech.

[19 : 05] We met him last week. And Abimelech recognises that God is with Abraham in everything he does. They make a treaty, there's a bit of backwards and forwards, and Abraham gets a well. He gets a well. A well in the promised land. And a well is not a lot, but like Isaac's birth, it is a first step. It's a first brick, if you like. Isaac took 25 years to arrive. The promised land will take over 400 years to arrive. But God has laid the first brick. It's a well, but his people will have to wait. And so, please, just a slide. This is where chapter 21 finishes.

So, Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba. I didn't know this, but the internet says it, so it must be true. A tamarisk tree is a massive evergreen tree. It's a massive one.

[20 : 02] Abraham plants one in the promised land. It's like he's planting a flag for God in the land. And then he called on the name of the Lord, the eternal God. And you can see the eternal God, there's a hinting that God doesn't count time the way we do.

He doesn't count waiting the same way we do. He's eternal. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time. For a long time still, the land will be occupied by Philistines. Abraham's descendants will have to wait for vacant possession. He's not a same day delivery God, but he does deliver. Thanks, Tech.

For us, God promised that Jesus will return and make a totally new world. And so far, he's taken 2,000 years and still know Jesus. It is tempting to take matters into our own hands. It's a trial, as Cynthia was telling us in her testimony. It's a trial. I'm tired of waiting for God's blessings. I will make my own.

[21 : 09] I'm tired of waiting for Jesus to make things right. I will have a go myself. I can't wait for God any longer. I will trust in someone 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 is tied to our performance and our good deeds and how good Anglicans we are. 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 Isaac. Get rid of that Ishmael thinking 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 via Ishmael.

Jesus has taken so long to arrive. How are we going to remind ourselves in the wait? Promises are good. A promise from God is great, but even God, has to deliver.

[22 : 21] And so Jesus has already come. He will come again to take us home just as God said. So let me pray.

Father God, we are impatient and you seem to take forever. In this trial, please help us while we wait. Help us not to be Ishmaels in our thinking, that our works, our performance, our deeds can earn us blessings with you.

Help us to heed the warning that we will not inherit that way. Help us to wait on you to trust in your promised son, Jesus.

Thank you that you have laid bricks throughout history, Isaac's birth, the well, Jesus' initial birth. help us to look back on them and remember that you always do what you say.

In your name, Amen.