

A Way that Seems Right

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[0 : 01] Well for a short time let's turn now as we wait on the Lord to Genesis 16, looking at the teaching of this chapter, the main feature of it at least, where we find this attempt by Abram and Sarai to have a son for Abram through means other than what the Lord intended for them. Now the Bible sometimes very deliberately puts two different situations side by side.

Sometimes that's the case so that the impact of its teaching will actually make itself very clear to us and that's what you find here when you come from chapter 15 and the very obvious spiritual glow that you find, if you like to put it that way, in chapter 15 where the Lord, as we saw last time, has given such assurances to Abram that Abram indeed will have descendants that will be greater in number than the stars that he wrought before Abram as he looked up into the sky. And he then opened up something of the future for Abram and then we saw this rather mysterious ending to the chapter where the Lord, where it represents the Lord committing himself absolutely to fulfill this promise that he had given to Abram. And when he was saying to Abram in the, what happened there at the end of the chapter is really equivalent to God saying, if I don't keep my promise, then let the death that's represented here, let that come upon me. And of course we did see that actually God took that to himself anyway when it came to the death of Jesus Christ. But there is this wonderful, magnificent assurance and Abram basking in that assurance in chapter 15 and then all of a sudden you're into a very different set of circumstances. You're into a kind of gloomy period in Abram's life after he'd been 10 years in Canaan where by his own attempt and by Sarah's suggestion as well, they sought to kind of hurry up the promise of God. And of course that ended as we'll see in domestic strife, in a breakdown there for a while, even within the relationship of Sarah and Abram themselves. Let's look at Abram's deviation from God's way here first of all. And then we'll look at God's intervention as he came after Hagar had left her home where she was a servant to Sarah. God came and met her in the wilderness and through that the whole matter was redirected in the proper way. Abram's deviation came firstly from Sarah's plan. Sarah had had no children by that stage and she came up with this plan that her female Egyptian servant, whose name was Hagar, would be given to Abram as a wife, that he would have a child by her and that that child would come to be the son that God had promised to carry on God's plan and God's promises for Abram for the future. Now that was something that was acceptable in the custom of the time, but it wasn't at all in accordance with God's plan here for Abram. It wasn't that Sarah didn't believe God's promise. It wasn't that she didn't actually accept it. It wasn't that she was acting through sheer unbelief, but she was impatient. She couldn't actually wait for the promise of God in the natural way of it for herself to have a child. She didn't at that stage see that coming at all to pass. So she came up with this idea that he would have a son through this servant, Hagar. Now let's just pause over that, because there are a number of things in that that are actually important for us. The end that she had in view and that Abram complied with was the one that God had specified in his promise, that Abram would have a son. And through that son, that the promise of God for his descendants and to give his descendants this inheritance of Canaan, that that's actually come to pass. That was what Sarah had in mind. That's what Abram himself had in mind. And because that was the end that they had in mind, the means that they now chose in order to try and reach that end seemed to be acceptable. It seemed to be the right way. It did not seem to be sinful and wrong. And the point for that ourselves is that sometimes we can have the right end in view.

We can have something in view that we know is pleasing to God. For example, people's conversion. We know that God is pleased with people's lives being changed. We know that as a congregation or as a challenger bus team, whatever work we're engaged in and in whatever way, the objective that we have is the growth of Christ's kingdom, the glory of Christ. That's the end we

have in view.

But the means toward it must fit with God's purpose and God's plan and God's specification. We cannot take it upon ourselves to invent ways other than what God has laid down for us.

[5 : 32] And if we try and come up with our own way of things, not in accordance with the clear teaching of scripture or the revelation that God has given us, then we must realize that the end we're seeking to achieve will not be achieved. At least we have no warrant to have it achieved, to expect it to be achieved. Now, if you think about it, this is precisely the way that Satan came to tempt the Lord in the wilderness. The end in view was that Jesus would have the glory of all of these kingdoms of the world given to him. The devil knew that. That was the end in view. But the devil also knew that there was a cross for Jesus, that there was a death to be faced up to and accomplished.

And so he said to Jesus, all these will I give you and the glory of them, if you will fall down and worship me. In other words, he was really saying to Jesus, the Son of God, you don't have to reach that end by the way that God has purposed through this humiliation that is for you in this way that you're living your life, through the deprivation that this period in the wilderness is an example of, through this time of being a servant, you're the Son of God.

Why actually not take it my way and reach the end that you have in view through that? Because, you know, you can just imagine that the insinuation of the devil was just equivalent saying, all you're going to get if you follow the path you're on is the death of the cross. That's all this world is going to have for you. But if you follow my way, I will give you all the kingdoms and the glory of them. All you have to do is just fall down and worship me.

And of course the Lord instantly resisted and dismissed both the suggestion and Satan himself. And I think that tells us that there is something of this satanic, of this dark, sinister, sneaky, subtle foe in what's happening here in Abraham's life. It's not just something that Sarai and Abraham themselves have come up with. There is this dark power seeking to frustrate the ways of God. Seeking to actually bring the plan and the purpose of God to nothing by bringing another way into the mind of Agar and Sarai and Abraham so that they'll try and follow this other way. And that dark power, that satanic power, that opposition to God knows that if they go on that path, then they're leaving the path of blessing. So that's the point that we have to take account of ourselves. God has given us great promises. But we mustn't try and rush God into fulfilling them. God has given us many promises in his word for ourselves individually, for ourselves as a church, as a people, as a congregation, to his church at large throughout the world. But he has his own time scale. He has his own timetable. He has his own diary. He has his own points at which he does things his way. And what he wants us to do is to follow him, to be faithful to him, to let him be God, and not to try and do his work for him while we're doing our service for his name's sake. That was Sarai's plan. And here is Abram's compliance.

He went in to Agar, she conceived, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. Abram went along with the plan. Sarai came up with the idea. But really the chapter, as the whole of these passages, is really about Abram. It's not so much about Sarai, though she features strongly in it. It's really just as it was in the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Yes, there is a contribution from Eve, but the purpose and the responsibility ultimately is Adam's. And so it is here with Abram as well. You see, the moment he listened to Sarai and her idea, he switched off to God. And that's what happens when we actually give another voice more attention than the voice of God. We're really switching off to God. However good the idea seems, however good the suggestion and the plan may seem to be. If comparing it with God's word, it's different to what he would have us do, then we mustn't follow it. If we switch on to some other ideas, if we switch on to somebody else's suggestion other than God's, if it contradicts what God has given us, then we're switching off to God, if we follow out that plan for ourselves.

[10 : 57] Sometimes, whether we're wives or husbands, and whoever close the relationship is, sometimes we need to switch off to what they're saying. Apologies to wives for that, but sometimes it is the case.

Sometimes wives also need to switch off to husbands, because very often the wives are the wisest ones when it comes to decisions. Well, not in this instance, because Sarai was wrong. Sarai was impatient. Sarai was actually trying to speed up God's work and God's promise. And Abram was wrong to listen to that. He knew the promise of God. He knew the kind of God he was dealing with. He knew he was the God of the miraculous. He knew that already he had done great things in his

life. He knew that God had committed himself absolutely to bringing a son to Abram in God's own way. And he shouldn't have listened to an alternative proposal. And that led to domestic strife. It's not a surprise when you actually come to read there of how things broke down temporarily between Abram and Sarah, because what happened was when Hagar, who was a servant after all and didn't really have any position in the home other than being a servant of Sarai, when she saw that she was going to have this child to Abram, it gave her a sense of superiority. She was going to have the child to the master of the household, Abram, and Sarai, his wife, was childless. So all of a sudden, Hagar comes to see herself above Sarai and looks down on her with disdain and with contempt and treats her with the utmost disrespect. Hagar wasn't used to being in that position. She didn't know how to handle that position. And it was Abram and Sarah who put her in that position. She had no choice in the matter. She couldn't refuse Sarai's instruction to go and bear a child for Abram. And so, she actually looked with disdain upon her mistress, looked with contempt. Or the Hebrew really literally says she was dishonoured in her eyes. Sarai was dishonourable in the eyes of Hagar. And what happened? Well, Sarai took it out on Abram. May the wrong done to me be on you. I gave my servant to your embrace. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me. In other words, she's throwing it back at Abram. And she's blaming Abram for it. She's forgotten that she came up with a plan. That's what taking the wrong path will do to you. Because the further on you go with it, the more convinced you are that you did the right thing, but somebody else botched it up, the more you're going to cast the blame onto someone else. The more you're going to lose sight of the fact of your own responsibility and cast the blame onto someone else. That's what she did.

That's what happens when we leave the ways of the Lord. Sarai's anger comes across. Sarai's apportioning of blame comes across. So she cast it back at Abram. And you know, when you look at it carefully, all of this on Sarai's part really goes back to, you can trace it back to something that lurks inside the heart of each and every one of us.

[14:37] It's called self. It's called selfishness. And just because we're a Christian doesn't mean that self has gone away. The Lord said that the essence of discipleship is denying self.

Actually putting self to death. And Sarai here is undoubtedly selfish in the plan that she came up with because if you cast your mind back there to verse 2.

Sarai said to Abram, behold, now the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her. Notice that little word, I. One letter. It's the biggest word in the English language as far as the Bible is concerned. I.

That takes you right into your own heart. Into your own bias towards sin at times. Into the workings of the flesh. That's what she said. She didn't say, go to my servant. It may be that you can obtain children by her or that she will obtain children for you. She said, it may be that I shall obtain, that I shall be built up, that I will have something out of this. Through Hagar.

Watch that I. As I say that to myself too. It doesn't matter what position you've got. Whether you're like Sarai or like Hagar. It's the very same thing that came across in Hagar's contempt then for Sarai when she knew that she was going to have a child. This little I becomes so big in practice because she looked with disdain upon her mistress of Sarai.

[16:35] I. What a huge amount of damage has been done in the course of human history by this one letter word. I. If a man will be my disciple, let him deny himself. Let him put the I to death and put him, God, Jesus, in its place. Let him deny himself and follow me, not I.

There's Abraham's deviation. So Hagar left the home and she fled from her mistress and she found herself in the wilderness and then God came into the situation. So let's look at God's intervention.

In verse 8 there you find the angel of the, verse 7, the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shoe. Now this was the way back to Egypt. So it looks like Hagar was just heading back to the place that she belonged to originally, to Egypt.

This was where she was making her way back to her native place. But she stopped here beside the spring of water in the wilderness. And the angel of the Lord found her. The angel of the Lord, as you know, is a figure that appears throughout the Old Testament and is a very important figure but rather mysterious figure because sometimes the angel speaks for God, sometimes the angel actually speaks as God.

Sometimes the angel speaks as if it was God actually present there. And indeed we understand that that's what in fact is the case, that sometimes God himself appears in the angel of the Lord and speaks there directly as in fact here in the name of God. The angel of the Lord said, I will surely

multiply your offspring. And the other things that follow on from that, especially the naming that Hagar gave, she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her. So the Lord is present in the angel of the Lord, the angel of the covenant, other names for him. And so that's what's happening here as well.

[18 : 57] The Lord has come himself through this figure to intervene in the situation. And he puts a question. In verse 8 he said, Hagar 7 of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?

Now that's some question. Because it's a question that applies to every life here today. Where have you come from and where are you going? In other words, what is the direction of your life?

What path are you actually following in your life? Where have you come from? A Christian can say, I have come from, just like the Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, I have come from the way to the city of destruction and I'm going to the celestial city. I have come from that lostness into which I was born and I'm actually heading for the place that God has for his people.

Let's put that question to ourselves. Let's put it honestly to ourselves. Let's put it seriously to ourselves because I'm not asking it. I don't have the right to ask it of you. I'm acting in the name of God.

As a messenger of God. Where have you come from? And where are you going? What direction is your life taking?

[20 : 25] Have you come to that U-turn? That essentially is knowing Christ and turning from sin to God and giving your life to Christ, into the custody and care of Christ.

Let's reflect on this question today. Let's make it a point throughout the day to come back and reflect on this and what it says to ourselves. Where have you come from? And where are you going?

That's the question and Eger answered it in a way she did. The Lord said to her then, return to your mistress. I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude and so on. God sent her back to where she had come from.

Now there's a point in that as well for us. Eger was really turning her back on the problem at home, wasn't she? She was going to go back to where she had come from originally to Egypt, leaving this place of strife, this difficult situation, this complex set of issues that had come up in her life. You can't blame her in a sense.

It's a very sad sight and it makes very sad reading to actually see a godly couple treating a servant in this way. When you read back over it again in detail, look at the way that not only did Sarah cast it back at Abram, Abram then cast it back at Sarah and said, she's in your power. You do what you like with her.

[22 : 06] And then Sarah took it out on her and Eger just left the strife, the bitterness of that home. Sad reading.

But reality. It's a fact. And so God found her. And he sends her back to face up to the issue that she's left. And there's a lesson of course in that for us too.

You don't solve problems by running away from them. You don't solve problems whether it's in a life, individual life, in one's personal life.

You don't solve the problem by pretending it's not there. By turning your back on it. By running away from it. By taking up something else that hopefully will make the problem something less in your mind.

Or eventually make it disappear altogether. Face up to it. God is saying face up to it. God is saying take it on yourself to shoulder the burden of it.

[23 : 05] And especially if it is something that's come between yourself and God. That's the most important thing of all. It's one thing on a personal relationship. And it's important there as well in terms of human relationships.

Not to let things fester. But to deal with them. Face up to them. But it's especially important when we come to a relationship between ourselves and God. Something to repent of.

Something that's gone wrong. Something as in the case of Sarah, Abram, Hagar here together.

Face up to it God is saying. Come back to me with it.

Tell me about it. Express your sorrow over it to me. Confess it to me. Repent of it. Turn from it. But don't try and bury it yourself.

Don't try and deal with it yourself. Don't try and put it away. Take it to me. I deal with it. I'm the forgiver. I'm the one who covers sin. So that's the first thing there for us to remember.

[24 : 09] We don't solve problems by running away from them. Elijah tried to do the same thing. Remember, God caught up with him in the wilderness. He dealt very graciously with him. He gave him food to help him.

For another 40 days. He went in the strength of that. Till he came to Horeb, the mount of God. And then, bang, comes this question. What are you doing here, Elijah? Is this where I put you? Is this what your ministry has come to? Is this where your calling is to be fulfilled? And he sent him back. You can appreciate why Elijah went there. He was tired. He was worn out.

He was shattered. He was a human being. Albeit, a much greater one than we will ever be. But God, when he met him, he redirected him.

He sent him back to where he was to serve him. And so it is for you and for me as well. We don't solve problems by running away from them. And some people try to do that by not really being terribly happy in a congregation.

[25 : 10] Things haven't been what they like. So they just go somewhere else. Commit yourself to the Lord. And where you are, stick it out. Because that's what God has intended for us.

Life's not going to be all that easy sometimes. We don't solve that by running away from it. We do it by facing up to it. By bringing it to God.

By looking for his strength. And he will redirect us. However reluctant other people are to do it. To listen to us.

To help us. One thing you can be absolutely sure about is. God will never do that to you. God will never tell you. I don't take that responsibility.

I'm not going to shoulder that burden. Go to somebody else. God is there. God is there. As the shepherd of his people. And as he comes today to say to us.

[26 : 07] Face up to your problem. He's doing that so that you can take it to himself. And experience for yourself. The wonderful warmth. God's gracious embrace.

So Hagar then comes to name this God who met with her. She called the name of the Lord who spoke to her. You are a God of seeing. This is a rather difficult phrase in the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

So it's translated here. You are a God of seeing. It could be translated. Have I. You are a God who sees me. And then the next part of it as well is difficult to translate.

She said truly here I have seen him who looks after me. Or have I really seen him here who sees me. Or possibly it could be would I have looked here for the one who sees me.

All of these possible ways of translating. But you can really focus on two issues in what Hagar said. Just briefly. She is first of all saying that God sees her.

[27 : 14] That God actually looked into her situation absolutely clearly and infallibly. And she has come to appreciate the fact that because God sees her.

And God saw her. And God is now seeing her. He knows what he's doing. He knows why he's saying to her what he's saying to her. Isn't it a wonderful thing for you and I today.

That when God says I'm seeing you. It's not just to fill us with a sense of dread. That God is looking at every single detail of our lives. That is true. But what God is really saying to us is.

I'm seeing into your need. You don't actually have to worry. That I don't appreciate all of your need. And all of your situation. And all of your pain. And all of your reasons for questioning.

And all of what you feel in your heart. I know it. I see it. And there's great comfort there for you today as a believer. That God sees you.

[28 : 18] That God is assuring you. Nothing of your situation is lost on him. And the other aspect of it. Is that God reveals himself. You are a God of seeing.

You could translate that. You are a God of appearance. Because when God comes to meet with Hagar. He comes to help her in her situation. How does he help her?

Not just by assuring her that he sees her. But by revealing himself to her. In a way that assures her in this way. How does God help us in our circumstances?

Is it by speaking to us from a distance. And saying don't worry. I am seeing you. I can see you from a distance. You are not lost to my vision. No there is that. But that's not all there is.

Naturally God is saying. I'm here with you. I'm in this situation. I'm revealing myself to you now. So that I'll help you through this. And I'll take the weight.

[29 : 14] And I'll redirect you. You are a God of appearance. Imagine our darkness. If God had not revealed himself to us at all.

If we had no Bible. If we had no Holy Spirit to direct us. If we had no indwelling Christ in our hearts. What would our lives be like? All of us today. We are Christians. Can truly say. And should say in thankfulness to God.

You are a God of appearance. You have revealed yourself to me. And I'm thankful for it. You have shown me yourself. And I want to see more of you. And to appreciate more of you.

Show me more of yourself. As we saw last week. That was Moses' great prayer. A man of God. Who knew God so intimately. And yet he said. I beseech you Lord. Show me your glory. Give me more.

[30 : 17] Of what you are in yourself. Reveal that to me. So that my life will be the more assured. And the more strengthened. And she says here to God.

You God. Are a God of seeing. Truly I have seen him. Who looks after me. And where. Has God demonstrated that.

Most of all to us. Well he's done so. In the. Enfleshment. In the incarnation of his son. In the great words of John.

In John 1.14. The word. The eternal word. That was with the father. The word. Became flesh. And dwelt amongst us.

And when you compare that with Hebrews. In the likes of chapter 2. Verses. 16 to 18. You'll find that Jesus took upon him. Our human nature.

[31 : 17] Why did he do it? To make reconciliation. For the sins of his people. So that he might be a faithful high priest. In things pertaining to God.

That he may be able to. Strengthen. To succor. To support. To support. Those who are being tempted. It's all about. The helping God.

The God of grace. The God. Who comes into our circumstances. Who comes alongside us. Who dwells within us. And therefore. As we dwell in him.

We are assured. As Hagar was assured. That we have with us. Someone. Who is a God of seeing. Therefore. The well was called.

Beer. Lahai. Roy. Literally means. The well of the living one. Who sees me. Every point of blessing.

[32 : 13] In your life. Is really like this well. This spring of water. That Hagar. Received such benefit. That he was beside. You can say.

Of every moment. Of blessing. In your life. Beer. Lahai. Roy. It's a well. It's a refreshment. It's the well. Of the one.

Who sees. And helps me. So let's make sure. That we are noting. Every point. Of blessing. Along life's journey. And that there are many times.

In our diary. When we write the word. Beer. Lahai. Roy. The blessing. Of a gracious God. Let's pray.

We ask. Oh Lord. Oh God. That you would bless. Your own word to us. We pray that. As you bless us. So we might mark. These blessings. For your glory. Go before us now.

[33 : 13] Into the rest of this day. Hear our prayer. Accept our worship. And cleanse us from sin. For Jesus sake. Amen.