

You Can't Hurry God

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[0 : 00] This particular chapter, just as we say, looking at it by way of overview. Now let us be in no doubt whatever that Abraham was a giant in the faith.

His life, from the moment that he left out of the Chaldees and went in response to God's calling, was one where he demonstrated great faith.

He had many battles and many trials and many troubles, but throughout his life the one thing that shone out was his faith. He was a giant in the faith.

Yes, he had his flaws and his failings, and that's one of the lovely things about the biblical account of the different people of God, is that the Bible shows them just as they are.

Yes, they're great saints, and they lived by faith, but they were human, and they made their mistakes, and they had their flaws, and they had their dark moments.

[1 : 08] The Bible doesn't hide these things. And they're not there so that we might sit in judgment of them and shake our head and give the little tut-tut and say, oh, look at what they did.

That's not the point. The point is that God is giving us these historical lessons regarding his people to teach us. It's there for our instruction, for our benefit, in order that we may learn.

There was nobody perfect walking this world throughout his life other, of course, than the Lord Jesus Christ. But Abraham, as we say, was this great, great man of faith.

And in this particular chapter, we see one of the big mistakes that we can all be guilty of, and that is that we try to help God.

We try to help God because we're impatient. We try to help God because he's not working out things the way that we expected.

[2 : 12] We try to help God because we don't trust him sufficiently. And these are three basic problems that we face all the time. We do not trust the Lord the way that we ought.

And that's why so often we take it upon ourselves to interfere with God's purposes and God's plans. Or we feel that this is not going the way I expected, the way I wanted.

And so we again put our hand on the thing and say, right, I better do this, I better do that. So this chapter really is a chapter which shows us so clearly that when God plans and God purposes and God reveals that he's going to do something, our wisdom is to learn to wait upon God.

And that is one of the hardest things that we can do. And yet it's in the waiting that God so often deals with us and teaches us and instructs us and he breaks so much of who we are through this whole process of waiting.

So that we lose the benefit of what God is doing in us when we do like Abraham and Sarah did there in trying to help God. Now we find here that Sarah is the initiator of what was going to cause a lot of heartache in the home.

[3 : 39] And of course we know that God's plans can never be ultimately thwarted. And that even through what happened here, although this wasn't what God had revealed to Abraham as the way, yet through it there are great spiritual lessons.

We're not going to go into them today, but if you go to Galatians, we find Paul is using the birth of Ishmael and the birth of Isaac and all that resulted from that teaching us great truths about the Christian faith.

So you see, God always overrules and overrides everything for good, even although human mistakes are made along the way.

Anyway, the years had gone by, and remember how God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a huge nation. That there would be more.

Remember how he was looking up at the night sky, God said to him, Count the stars and the sand of the seashore. He said, Just like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore, you will be the

father of such a nation, such a great nation.

[4 : 51] But the years have gone by, year after year after year after year. They're getting older. Abraham, we read there, when Ishmael was born was now 86. Sarah was younger than that.

And they were seeing the fulfillment of the promise becoming less and less and less every day. And so we find that Sarah takes the initiative.

And she has this idea that she would take her servant girl, Hagar, and give Hagar to Abraham as another wife.

Now again, today we'd say to ourselves, Oh, that's extraordinary. But that, we've got to remember, that that was the custom of the day. It wasn't something that nobody would have got a shock about that, because there were often people had more than you find.

Often in the Bible, they had more than one wife and sometimes several wives. But that was never, although God permitted that, he never authorized that.

[5 : 54] Because always from the very beginning, the purpose and the plan of God was that there would be one man, one woman making up a marriage. That was it. A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.

And God never authorized that there would be a multiplicity of wives. But he did what we term, he permitted it to happen. But when you look at all the families where there were more than one wife, there were always problems, always troubles.

And so it was in this home here. And it's one of the things that I think that we have to come to understand, is that when we try and help God, things just don't work out the way that we thought. Now, when you say to yourself straight away, Sarah was completely wrong in what she did. And we have to agree and say, yes, she was. She shouldn't have done what she did.

But then on the other hand, you've got to see it from Sarah's side, because Sarah is still exercising faith here. Now, you may say to yourself, how is that?

[7 : 06] Because she believes, she still believes God's promise that Abraham was going to be the father of a great race. And God had given the promise specifically to Abraham.

So maybe Sarah is thinking to herself, yes, I believe what God said. I believe that Abraham is going to be the father of a great race. But maybe I'm not going to be their mother.

Maybe it is with somebody else. So I think there's an element in which we can possibly excuse, at least to a certain extent, Sarah, because maybe this is what she is thinking.

However, again, I would say that she is wrong, because God intended that from the beginning, it was one man, one woman making up a marriage. And if God had given that promise to Abraham, it was going to include his wife, Sarah, as well.

Life is often complicated. You and I know that. And we often try and do what we believe is best for ourselves, for our family, for the situations that we're in.

[8 : 16] So often we meet challenges. And nobody goes out of their way and say, right, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to do the most crazy thing and see how it turns out.

If you face that challenge or that problem, you don't say to yourself, right, I'm going to, what I'm going to decide to do is the most absurd thing. I'm going to do what nobody else would do. I'm going to do the very opposite of what I think I should do.

That's not what we do. We make decisions. We look at situations. And we make decisions based upon how we see things, how we perceive things, how we expect things to turn out.

So often, that's very often the normal way in which we go about. But for the Christian, we should always, always involve the Lord. Because we've got to remember that the Word of God is the only rule to direct us, how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

And one of the great mistakes we can make going through life is, yes, involving the Lord, but just telling Him what we're going to do. And we make our plans and our purpose, and we think this and do this, and then we say to the Lord, by the way, Lord, this is what I'm going to do.

[9 : 24] And we say, we're praying to the Lord. The Word of God always has to be the basis, the rule, the foundation upon which we build our life. And you know something?

God is far keener to reveal His will to us than we are to find it. You know, so often we say, I wish I knew God's will for my life.

Well, God has a will for, a purpose for your life. And He's far keener that you would come to discover that from Him. He, He, He has a purpose.

He has a plan. But you know the problem is often this, that there are times as we go through our lives, and all of a sudden we come upon a big situation.

And we, we really don't know what to do. And we say, I really must pray to the Lord. And we're saying, Lord, help me, guide me here, show me where to go, show me what to do, help me.

[10:23] And there's nothing coming from the Lord. And you're saying to yourself, why, why is the Lord not answering? And then maybe the still, small voice will whisper in your ear and say, isn't it funny that you've been going through day after day, and week after week, and month after month, and you haven't bothered too much about my will?

You haven't been asking me every day. And asking for direction and guidance. But only now when something big comes, all of a sudden, you want me to tell you.

And so, this is why it is so important that, every day we're seeking, remember what it says, trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not to your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him. What does it say? He will direct your paths. So if we are every day, speaking to the Lord, putting our trust in the Lord, asking the Lord just to lead us in the right way, here and there, we believe he will. He doesn't lead us contrary to his word. It's always in keeping with his word. But he will lead us. He will guide us. He will show us.

[11:44] And I think this is one of the mistakes that we find in this chapter. Abraham, the man who was never away from the altar. Remember we saw before, the two features of his life, the tent and the altar.

There's no mention here of him sacrificing, of him consulting the Lord. What should I do? Is Hagar's suggestion, is Sarai's suggestion a right one?

No, he doesn't. And you see, this is the problem. When you look back at your own life, and it's all very well for us to, with all the hindsight that we have, of looking at Abraham and Sarai at this particular time.

Because we know what's happened. We know the outcome. But at that particular moment, for them, it looked rational. It looked logical. Here's an idea.

Yeah, this is in keeping with the custom of the day. And Sarai would take the baby that Hagar had, and kind of adopt us their own, and everything would be fine.

[12:43] This was a logical way of working it out. And I think you and I, we look back over our lives, and some of the mistakes that we made, we've all made mistakes in life.

And some of the mistakes we made, were at times exactly like that, when it looked rational, it looked logical, and we thought what we were doing was the right thing to do, but it turned out it wasn't.

And the thing is that sometimes we made these mistakes because we haven't trusted the Lord. So anyway, this is, here we have this particular situation.

And the sad thing is, as we see here, nothing of what they expected. Well, I shouldn't say nothing. Yes, Hagar became pregnant. That's what they expected and hoped.

But the outworking of it didn't outwork the way they expected. And you and I know that in our own lives. We make judgments and we make decisions based on how things are.

[13:52] And we kind of expect the circumstances and everything kind of to stay the same. We kind of worked out how it's all going to be. But we see very clearly here, it didn't work out the way they expected.

Because the home became full of tensions and arguments and divisions. Things that hadn't been there before. In fact, we even find that Sarah is asking God's judgment.

That God would judge Abraham. Be judged between herself and Abraham. The God who was all the time there blessing their home. And Sarah is now saying, God, come and judge.

So you see, by doing the wrong thing, all these tensions and all these issues and all these problems have arisen. And you know, if we run ahead of God, we will find the same thing.

And we're very guilty of doing that. Of trying to pressurize God to hurry up. And we're often in different situations in life and we're waiting.

[14:55] I bet you everybody in here today is waiting for something. We're waiting. And waiting's difficult. And sometimes we might not use the actual language where we say to the Lord, Lord, hurry up.

But we're certainly seeing it in our heart. But you know something? We cannot pressurize God. God will never be put under any form of pressure by anything that we say or anything that we do.

He will sometimes allow us to make our mistakes, but God will still overrule and override in order that his own purposes will be fulfilled in this world.

And it becomes harder for us today to wait on the Lord because we live in a crazy world. The demands on today's society are really they're irrational and they're unreasonable.

All the time there is this demand for hurry, hurry, hurry. It's now. Everything has to be bigger and better. and people, so many people living through their work and things under the most incredible unreasonable demands.

[16:09] And you see it in industry, you see it in all different things. Whatever you achieved last year, next year has to be bigger and better. And whatever is achieved next year, it's got to be bigger and better.

Who says that? See, people are living under this incredible pressure of demand. Demand. And so, it's very easy for us to be caught up in this and everything is instant, everything is now.

And I often think the Lord is saying, this is not the way I intended. Now, I don't mean by any means that we take away our work ethic. The Lord expects us to work well.

The Lord expects us to do our work well. But I believe that we're living in a world that creates the most unreasonable demands upon us.

And that this is not the way the Lord designed or expected or wanted it, I should say, to be. And so, there's something of that creeps into the Christian life, where we're wanting now, we expect now.

[17:14] And we're saying, I can't wait. And so, we go and we try and help. But you know something? The Lord waits. There's a lovely version of Scripture. The Lord waits that he might be gracious.

Let's never forget that. You see, sometimes the blessing that you're looking for, the blessing you're praying for, the Lord says, you know something? I'm going to give you that.

But you're not ready for it. Because if I gave it to you just now, it wouldn't be a blessing. It would be more of a curse. I have to do work in you first before you receive it.

when God took Israel out of Egypt and was taking them to the promised land, they were not ready to go straight into the promised land. And you just see in that journey through the wilderness, failure after failure after failure because their hearts were so far from God.

They had taken idols out. There was still, God had so much work to do in them, 40 years of breaking them before they were ready to inherit the land of promise. And it's often the same with you and with me.

[18:21] God is at work, breaking us, remoulding us, shaping us, preparing us for the blessing that he intends. And the more that we are impatient, the more it shows that we are not ready for the blessing that God is going to give us.

And so that's one of the things that we find here. That Abraham and Sarah, as they tried to run ahead of God, they brought nothing but problems and troubles into their own home.

And as we say, nothing worked out the way they expected. And so we find Sarah, she's saying to Abraham, there, look, may the Lord judge between you and me.

But Abraham said to Sarah, behold, your servant is in your power. Do to her as you please. I don't know at what stage Abraham was here. I would imagine Abraham was in a mixture of guilt.

He was probably overwhelmed by the circumstances. there would have been all kinds of emotions and he certainly isn't showing any leadership at this particular point and he just says to Sarah, just do with her whatever you want.

[19:29] Because you see, one of the big situations that had happened is that when Hagar became pregnant, she began to look at Sarah in a totally different way.

She began to look down on her. And Sarah, as a mistress couldn't handle this. And so, as we see, the end result is that because Sarah dealt harshly with Hagar, that Hagar ran away.

Hagar now had nothing. And we find a very interesting meeting takes place where the angel of the Lord meets with Hagar. Now the angel of the Lord here is the Lord Jesus Christ.

when we find this, the angel of the Lord with the capital L, the L-O-R-D here, this is the second version of the Godhead. And it's very obvious that this is the Lord, because Sarah says, you are a God of seeing.

And also, we find the angel of the Lord said to her, you are pregnant, you shall bear a son, you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction, tells all these things.

[20 : 40] And in verse 10, the angel of the Lord said to her, I will surely multiply your offspring. No angel could do that, or say that, or have that authority by saying, I will, this is the Lord.

And so, Hagar, of course, called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, you are a God of seeing. And she named the well there, the well of the living one who sees.

And I want us just to stop there for a moment and conclusion and to highlight what we're seeing here. This description of God. You are a God of seeing.

And I think that's something that we need to focus upon and dwell upon. Because God is somebody who sees all his creation. All his creation.

Nothing happens anywhere in this creation. Anywhere. Not just in this world, but up in the sky, in the heavens, anywhere, anywhere, but the Lord sees.

[21 : 45] But not only does he see everything, but he knows about everything. It's not just a matter of, you know, we can see things, but there's a lot of what we see we don't maybe understand or fully realize what is happening.

we can only see things through our own eyes, and we form our judgments as to what is actually happening by our own minds and our experience and such like.

That's not so with God. God sees it as it is. He knows absolutely every single thing. But he doesn't just see because of who he is, but he also sees because of where he is.

Because God isn't only all-knowing and all-wise, he is everywhere present at the one time. He is as much here as he is in America and in Africa and in Australia and New Zealand as he is anywhere else at the one time.

His presence fills the whole earth. You get your head around that? No, nor can I. But that is how it is. That's what the Bible reveals to us and that's what faith lays hold upon.

[23 : 02] We believe this to be true. And his knowledge of us is so great, he doesn't just see us as we're sitting here like what we're wearing and he sees what we're thinking.

He knows our attitudes. He knows our thoughts. He knows even why we do what we do. He knows whether we do something out of pride or out of selfishness or out of resentment.

You know we can do something that looks good out of a completely wrong motive. The Lord knows. You see, that's one of the reasons why the Lord says judge not, don't judge anybody.

Don't judge anything that anybody is doing because you don't know why they're doing it. The things that a person is doing that might look good, they might be doing from a completely wrong motive.

And even some of the things that people do that aren't very good, maybe they're doing it because they meant well but it all went wrong. We have to be very careful and that's why the Bible so often says to us don't judge.

[24 : 10] Because the Lord knows exactly what is happening. He knows exactly what you're thinking right now. He knows your attitude to Him, your attitude to what His Word is saying, His attitude to life in general, your attitude to everybody.

He knows every single thing about us. And this is one of the really serious, solemn things because back in Genesis in chapter 6 and 7, because remember when God flooded the world, that verse 5 in chapter 6, the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and had grieved his heart. This is why the flood came. It's just solemn thought that.

The wickedness of man was great in there. Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Remember, the Lord is the heart reader.

I hope that he's not seeing that this is how it is with you and with me. But we see this also, this description of God seeing, the language is it's a continual present.

[25 : 37] In other words, he is always seeing. It isn't just a matter of that he sees now and again or that he sees, but it's as if he's seeing, it's always, always, always, always, presently seeing.

But I think what this passage highlights is that God sees us in our need. Here's this Egyptian woman who was initially a pagan, whether she came under the influence and we hope and pray that she did of Abraham's home and Abraham's life.

She was somebody who initially didn't know about God. And here is God coming to meet with her. Hagar is in distress.

And you try and put yourself in Hagar's shoes. Here's a woman who has nothing. She has no rights in this world. She is now in a state where there is nobody to protect her or look after her.

At that moment, she's the most vulnerable woman anywhere. and God comes and meets with her. And God speaks to her. And I love that because it shows that God cares in a way that you and I don't understand.

[26 : 52] Maybe today, I don't know, maybe you in your own heart, not necessarily physically, but maybe you're on the run from something or from someone.

Maybe life is difficult for you because maybe you've fallen out with somebody. Or maybe there are issues or troubles with somebody or something. Or maybe you're just running away from God. You're still coming to church, but you're on the run from God. You know what you should do. You know you should submit. But so far, you haven't.

You're still running. Well, here is the Lord who comes and he meets and he deals. And he says to Hagar, look, Hagar, go back home. And he said, in fact, I'm going to tell you something. And God gives a great promise. Yes, her son gives the name, it's going to be Ishmael. It's going to grow up as a wild man. His hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him.

[27 : 53] But the other thing is he will be the father also of a great nation. We know of course that he became the father of the Arab nation. And of course the conflict that began in that home between the two, Abraham as the father of Ishmael and Isaac is the father of the great conflict that is going on to this very day in the Middle East.

The conflict that began in that tent all these years ago is still the conflict that is going on today. See, sometimes when we go wrong, if we make a mistake, if we try and run ahead of God, it's not just our shells are going to be affected.

The whole world can be affected. It's still being affected today. So you see the importance of looking to the Lord, of trusting in the Lord, of asking God to guide you, to direct you, to lead you in the way that you should go.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for being under your word and we pray that some of the lessons that have been taught to us from this chapter here may indeed be lessons that we take to heart.

Help us, Lord, to understand that there is nothing new under the sun and that our lives can impact other lives for good or for bad. And we pray that it might be for good.

[29 : 24] We pray that you will bless us in every conceivable way, socially, emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually, that we might know the richness of your grace in us and upon us.

Oh Lord, do us good. Be our shield and our shelter. Bless the cup of tea in the hall afterwards and watch over us and take away our sin. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We'll conclude singing from Psalm 139 from the Scottish Psalter. We're going to sing verses 1 to 6 and the tune is St. Andrew. Psalm 139 from the Scottish Psalter and the tune is St.

Andrew. It's on page 432. O Lord, thou hast me searched and known. Thou knowest my sitting down and rising up. Ye, all my thoughts afar to thee are known.

My footsteps and my lying down thou compasses always. Thou also most entirely art acquainted with all my ways. For in my tongue before I speak, not any word can be but altogether low.

[30 : 32] O Lord, it is well known to thee. 1 to 6, the tune St. Andrew. O Lord, thou hast me searched and known. O Lord, thou hast me searched and known.

Thou close my sitting down and rising up near all my thoughts afar to thee are known.

My footsteps and my lying down thou compasses always.

my love so most and tired are a print with all my ways.

For in my tongue before I see see not any word can be but all together Lord it is well known to thee.

[32 : 25] be behind me before thou hast be set and paid on me thy hand such knowledge is too strange for me to lie to understand now may the grace and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore.

Amen. peace and