

God Said and God Did

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Date: 29 October 2017

[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Genesis, Genesis chapter 21. I'm reading at the beginning, verses 1 to 3.

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abram a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. So, Abram called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. As we know, there are many ups and downs in life.

That's the nature of life. For some of you today, life might be, you might not even have really stopped to think what kind of period you're in in life.

Whether it is an up or a down, or whether it's a combination of both. But that is the nature of the world that we live in. There are laughter, there's laughter, and there are tears.

[1 : 00] It's inevitable, but we experience both. And this was a household that experienced both, both the tears and the laughter. And the chapter opens with a very, just very stark, bold statement.

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. You remember back in chapter 18 that the Lord had spoken these words.

Well, the time had come, and the Lord was absolutely true to his promise, as he always will be.

That's one thing we must, we must always, always remember. That God will always, always be true to his word. When you see God's word written, bank on it.

It's true. God won't change his mind. Or God isn't going to write something and then says, you know, maybe this isn't going to work out the way that I planned.

[2 : 09] Of course it will. It might not work out the way we thought, but it will work out the way he plans. It always does. And so the Lord, when he makes a promise, like he did to Abraham and Sarah, and said, but this time next year I will return and you will have a child.

And that's exactly what happened. And if you're here today and you're resting in the promises of God, don't become discouraged because these promises are not being fulfilled.

As we've been going through the life of Abraham, that's one of the things that is so clear to us, that God will often try us and test us in relation to his word.

And if you're building your life upon God's word, which I hope you are, be quite assured that you will be tested often. If God's word is what is foundational to your life and to what you are doing, and not just talking about your spiritual life, because at one level all our life is spiritual.

Jesus doesn't make a division when he was speaking to the people and saying, well, that's part of your compartmentalize your life, that's your spiritual life, your religious life is there, and then there's the rest of your life, your everyday life.

[3 : 25] No, as far as Jesus was concerned, it was just the one life. And that is how it is. And it is such that as we go through life, if our life is based upon God and his word, be sure of it, you'll be tested.

But the Lord will take you through these testings, and you will come out on the other side, and you will be a better person for it. Now, as I say, possibly you're here and you're discouraged.

Maybe you've been praying and praying about your family. Praying that whatever might be difficulties within your family, it might be the salvation of the souls of your family.

You might have been praying long and you believe you have God's word on it. Well, hang on in there, because the Lord will be faithful to his word. The one thing, the one note of caution that we always have to add with that, is that sometimes when the Lord will give us his word, and we're absolutely persuaded we have God's word, sometimes our understanding of it might be a little different to what God is implying.

And it's afterwards we come to realize God was absolutely true to his word. It was just that we misunderstood the situation a wee bit.

[4 : 53] We've also got to remember that sometimes the Lord's answer to our prayers will be purely spiritual. I've seen that, for instance, in praying for somebody who has been sick, somebody who has been really, really ill, and praying that the Lord would heal that person.

And believing that the Lord had answered that prayer, I was convinced of that. And the person subsequently died. But what I did come to believe or understand was that the Lord, yes, he did, he healed.

That illness was blessed to that person. So that although there wasn't a physical healing, there was a spiritual healing. So sometimes the Lord operates at a different level to us, but he will always be faithful to the word.

Well, here he is. He's faithful to his word, and he has come, and he is drawing near. When we find these words, the Lord visited Sarah, as he said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And prior to that, as we said, he had said, I will surely return to you about this time next year. Now, when we find it tells us of the Lord visiting, that word visiting has the idea of drawing near, of coming.

[6 : 16] The Lord draws near in judgment. The Lord draws near in mercy in different ways. But when he comes, draws near, it's always to do something. And that's what we find here.

Now, the birth of Isaac at one level was miraculous. At another level, it wasn't. It was Abraham fathered a child in an ordinary way.

Sarah gave birth to a child, and conceived and gave birth to a child in the ordinary way. But the only difference was that through their old age, both of them had reached a point where this would not have happened.

They had both passed that particular time when they would be fathering and mothering. And that is what God did. God empowered them to do that.

And there was a specific reason in this, because, as we'll see very briefly, but if we went into Galatians, we'd see more fully how there's a spiritual lesson being taught through the birth of Isaac and through Ishmael, who was born through the slave girl, Hagar.

[7 : 30] But the fact is that God, it's like he re-empowered. And when God does something, he does it completely, because it wasn't, it would appear, that it wasn't simply a moment of re-empowering, re-empowering for a moment, but that re-empowering continued, because after Sarah died, Abraham took another wife, and he bore children with her.

So it wasn't like just for a moment, it was something that God continued to do. And God shows his sovereign control over everything. And he has a heavenly timetable to everything.

And he wants us to trust him. That's one of the great reasons why we're going through the life of Abraham. I need it as much as you, to trust God in our lives.

Because Abraham, you know, he was an extraordinary, we haven't, we could go into it in so much more detail. Abraham was so human, he had his faults and his failings.

We've seen that. But the overriding flow of his life was one where he trusted God. And if there's one thing out of the whole Bible God wants us to do, it is to trust him.

[8 : 50] To believe him, even when we're in the dark, when things don't make sense, when we're down, when we're confused, when we're at the end of our resources, all the time God is saying, trust me, trust me.

From beginning to end, trust me. It is thee, if you were to pick one message out of Jesus, his whole ministry, it was, look, believe in me, trust in me, accept me.

And the life of Abraham, that's why he is the father of the faithful. His life was one that was just so trusting in the Lord. Well, anyway, here's Sarah, and we find that Isaac has been born, and we know that Isaac's name meant laughter.

And it was very fitting, because, remember how Sarah, when she heard the news, first of all, that she was to be a mother, she laughed. But the laughter now is a totally different type of laughter.

And one of the wonderful things about Sarah is that she went from not believing, through into great faith, because sometimes we were always emphasizing the faith of Abraham.

[9 : 58] Let us remember, there was great faith on Sarah's part as well. She went from unbelief, or almost saying, this is too, I can't really lay hold upon this, to actually firmly believing that she would be a mother.

And we're told that, in Hebrews 11, very clearly, by faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful, who had promised.

Sarah's faith is so much an exercise, in this whole story. So we mustn't, in any way, lose sight of that as well. Both Abraham, and both Sarah, are great examples, of faith. And, I love that, that there was a day, when she laughed, not maybe in derision, but in unbelief. But now, she's laughing in joy, at the fulfillment, of God's promises. That's what God does, with us as well. He takes us on that journey, and maybe there have been times, in your life, where you've almost laughed, at a situation, in unbelief, and so on. No. [11 : 06] But God, works on, and works through you, and does things, and eventually, you laugh the other way, and say, wow, this is amazing. God is true.

He is so, so dependable. Now, the, the birth of Isaac, as we say, was the fulfillment, of this great promise. And God, of course, had promised, that through, through Abraham, and through his seed, that the whole, world would be blessed.

And we follow that line down, there was Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Judah, on right through. And you know, it's very interesting, when you follow the chain, the links in the chain, all the way to Jesus, because that's the promise, through you, and your seed, all the nations of the world, will be blessed.

And the fulfillment, of that, is found in the birth of Jesus. But when you follow, the link down, and you come to Judah, you say, why, why not Joseph? Why, why, why pick, because some of the people, in that line, their, their history, wasn't what you would say, how, why did the Lord, for instance, David, David, David had been married, David had, as we know, had a, had a few wives, but David took to himself, remember Bathsheba, who belonged to another man, and he had the other man killed, after his, adulterous relationship, to try and hide, what he had done.

And yet, God, in his own wisdom, and displaying, his own grace, it's the son, of his, of David's relationship, with his wife, who became his wife, Bathsheba, Solomon, that is the line, through which, eventually, Jesus Christ comes.

[13 : 01] And our self-righteous, part of ourselves, sometimes, rises up, and saying, oh Lord, why did you do it that way? Well, it's not for us, to question, why the Lord does, but one of the things, the Lord continually shows us, is his grace, his abundant grace, and you know, sometimes, we have a problem, with God's grace, it's terrible, but sometimes, we think, does God really know, what he's doing here?

Of course he does, and sometimes, we have to stop, and think, if it weren't for God's grace, where would I be? So, this is one of the, the amazing things, that God does, he has this demonstration, of his, of his compassion, of his grace, of his love, of his mercy, running right through.

Now Isaac, here he is, at the time, when he was being weaned, and of course, we know Abraham, had the two sons, Ishmael, by his servant girl, Hagar, and Isaac, who's born to Sarah.

Isaac was the covenant son, he was the one, born by faith, he was the one, who was born, by the spirit, Ishmael, was the son of the flesh, Ishmael, was the son of impatience, he was the son, that was born, when Sarah, and Abraham, tried to help God, and, of course, domestic bliss, couldn't really, carry on, when this was happening, because there were two sons, and two mothers, and one father, in the house, one husband, and there came, came this time, when it tells us, that, Hagar, that Sarah, saw the son of Hagar, that's Ishmael, laughing, and this word, laughing, means he was mocking, he was deriding, little Isaac, and I've got to remember, there's a bit, quite an age difference, when it talks about, a child, in the Hebrew, a child, can mean, a baby, it can mean, literally a child, or it can mean, a very, a young teenager, and we know, that Ishmael, was quite, he would have been, about probably, about 13 or so, at the time, and he's mocking, and many people, have the idea, that he was mocking, the whole covenant, aspect, of Isaac, that he was making, making fun, he was, there was derision, against him, as being God's special, his chosen one, and there was this, he was casting up to him, and at Sarah, it wasn't just a matter of, jealousy, in what she saw, but there was, we would almost say, righteous indignation, attached to it, yes there would be, there would be jealousy,

I'm sure there was that as well, and seeing what was happening, and a mother's protective love, and coming in, on what's happening to my son, but I believe, because of the faith, that is highlighted, in the life of Sarah, that she was seeing, beyond that, and seeing that, this is almost a very threat, to God's covenant, and so she says, calls Abraham, and says, hey, Ishmael, and Hagar, have to go, now, sometimes the Bible, puts things, in a very, it underplays, it sort of, or plays down, just how radical, the things are, like for instance, when Jesus, appeared, amongst, the disciples, the first time, after the resurrection, it says, that they were pleased, of course they were

pleased, they were, they were, they were overwhelmed, with joy, and here it says, the thing displeased, Abraham, and the thing, was very displeasing, to Abraham, in other words, [16:52] Abraham, was a broken man, at this point, his heart, was torn, in what, in what Sarah, was saying, because there's no doubt, but that he, he loved his son, Ishmael was, he was saying, you mean I have to put him out, and I have to put Hagar out, and Sarah says, yes, they're not staying here, and God came to Abraham, and he said, Abraham, you've got to listen, to your wife, on this one, Hagar, and Ishmael, have to go, and it seems very, maybe to us, it might seem, so harsh, but, God is, showing here, and that, the apostle Paul, and again, if we had time, it's worth going through, Paul is showing here, this is an example, of the old, and the new, it's an example, of what is spirit born, and what is, of the flesh, Ishmael, was of the flesh, the old,

Ishmael, was of the impatience, Ishmael, was not, of the spirit, not of faith, and in our hearts, that's what happens, when a person, is born again, a fight begins, there's a conflict, in the home, the home of our heart, the home of our life, and you and I, are battling it, we're even battling it, in here, we're battling it, all the time, between the good, and the bad, the evil, and the righteous, and you and I, always know, the right way, we know the paths, of righteousness, we want to walk, along the paths, of righteousness, and most of the time, as Christians, we do, but we don't do it, as we should, and there are times, we waver of it, we waver, we go into, by path, meadow, or if you follow, pilgrim's progress, it's so accurate, of the Christians walk, and we struggle, and there's this, conflict, there's this war, going on, between grace, and our own, fleshly nature, and so often, like the apostle, we say, oh the good, that I would,

I don't do, and the evil, that I would not, that's what I end up doing, so there's this war, there's this conflict, and this is how, Paul uses it, if you go to Galatians, you will read about it, he uses this as the example, because as somebody has said, the Old Testament, is God's picture book, where he displays, what is happening, within our lives, through the lives, of these great men, and women, in the Old Testament, and so, Abraham has to put, Sarah, has to put, Hagar away, and, we can understand, that this was obviously, a, a, fairly difficult, for, for, for Abraham, but God came to Abraham, and he said, I will look after the boy, and, I will make a nation, of him as well, and you know, the conflict, it's incredible, when you think about it, because the conflict, that began in that home, is a conflict, that's going on, to this very day, between the, between the Jew, and the Arab, that is a conflict, because Ishmael, became the father, of the Arabic race, and, so that this conflict, that began, in that home, is perpetuated, right down, into the very day, that we're, we're living in, so the Lord,

Abraham made provision, he got some provisions, together, and Hagar, and Ishmael, set off, into the desert, but it wasn't long, of course, until the provision, ran out, and, as you know, in a desert place, it's a, it's a fearful place, to be without food, and especially, without water, and Hagar, became so, distraught, and upset, at the situation, because she saw that, that Ishmael, was going to die, without water, and she put him, under a bush, she had obviously, got so weak, and she couldn't bear, any longer, and she went, the distance of, when you would shoot an arrow, about that far away, she just couldn't bear, to see, her own child die, and so, it's a heart-rending, scene really, and the thing was, there, the mother, and the son, and they're perishing, because, of, the lack of water, and, and if we spiritualize that, as we always must, and remember that,

Jesus highlights himself, as the water of life, isn't it true, that so many people, are perishing, because of the lack, of Jesus Christ, and maybe, there are people, here today, and you know, deep down, in your own heart, that you need, Jesus, in fact, that's why, you're here today, you know, this world, was an absolute, playground to you, and you, there was a day, when you were so happy, in this world, and it gave you everything, but you might be, at a stage, in your life now, and you say to yourself, you know, the playground, is losing its fun, still a bit of a playground, still not bad, but it's not what it was, and maybe, there's a growing, awareness, that there's another, dimension to your life, and that you really, need to come, to know somebody, or someone, and when you come, to church, you're, you're being made aware, more and more, yes, I actually begin to know, I'm beginning to know now, who it is, I actually need, I need Jesus, the one who is, the water of life, and if today, you are here, and you still don't know Jesus,

[22:33] I would ask you, take this opportunity, right here, right now, because he is present, and ask him, to be your Lord, because you see, what happens here, Hagar, when the water, in verse 15, when the water, and the skin was gone, she put the child, under one of the bushes, then she went, and sat down, opposite him, a good way off, about the distance, of her bow shot, let me not

look, on the death, of the child, and as she sat, opposite him, she lifted up her voice, and wept, now they were both, obviously crying, up to God, and God heard, the voice of the boy, and the angel of God, called to Hagar, from heaven, and said to her, what troubles you Hagar, fear not, for God has heard, the voice of the boy, where he is, now, we don't have time, but there are, so many things, in here, we could go, and look at, a single mother, there's a sermon, of his own, in there, and, when you, if you were to look, at the life of Hagar, Hagar, had a really, quite a, a traumatic, a difficult life, she ended up, in situations, that were, had no, nothing to do, with herself, she was being thrown, from pillar to post, she had been, in Egypt, and the king of Egypt, gave her, as a servant girl, to Abraham, well, a servant girl, for Sarah,

Sarah, gave Hagar, to Abraham, in order that he, would father, a child with her, and now, she's thrown out, she's never had a voice, she's never had any right, she's never had anything, she's been thrown, from pillar to post, and so often, when you think, a single parent, we don't know, it's very easy, for us sometimes, to look this way, and that way, we don't know, the background, we don't know, what they're going through, but the thing is, here is, a single parent, and their child, and God hears, their cry, and it's important, for us to understand that, and God is, listening, and you know, might be here today, you might, be like, in here, and say, you know, I'm not churchy, I'm not, it's all very well, you look at Isaac, and you look at his line, he was of a covenant line, he was, he was of, the son of faith, he was spiritual, but me, I'm not churchy, I'm more like an Ishmael, how will God listen to me, yes, he did,

God says, I have heard the cry, of the boy, the boy who's not, of the covenant line, I've heard his cry, people say, will God hear, my cry, even although, I haven't come to faith, in Jesus Christ, yes he will, that's exactly, what he's done here, so you go to him today, whatever your situation, however you are, and ask him, and what did God do, God opened, the eyes of Hagar, and she saw, a well of water, that well, isn't that incredible, she was dying of thirst, beside a well of water, sometimes in the, in the desert, people who knew, where water holes were, or little wells, they would cover them, and kind of camouflage them, that might have been, the situation, but she was beside, what would keep her alive, and she didn't know, it took the Lord, to open her eyes, to see, and that's exactly, what you need today, that God would open your eyes, if today, you're saying to yourself,

I'm hearing all this, but you know something, it's not going in, it's not making sense to me, how am I supposed, to get from where I am here, into this position, where Jesus Christ, becomes my savior, you cry to the Lord, and say Lord, just as you opened, Hagar's eyes, to see the well of water, will you open my eyes, that today, I may see the well, of Jesus Christ, who is the water of life, and remember, what Jesus said, to the woman, whoever drinks, of the water, that I shall give him, shall never thirst, but of the water, that I shall give him, or her, shall be like a well of water, springing up, into everlasting life, will you today, go to the Lord Jesus, and you say to him Lord, come into my heart, even here and now, and once he's in, he's in forever, let's pray, Lord our God, we ask that you will do us good, we pray that, all of us may have our eyes open, to see you, as the great savior, the great savior of sinners, the great savior, who will take us, from death to life, from darkness to light, who will take us, from the lostness, to be found, and will take us, even from grace, to glory, Lord be with us, and be with all, who are heavy hearted today, and all who mourn, and we commit them all, into your care, and keeping, we know that, there are many heavy hearts, and we ask Lord, that you will, nurse them, and bless them, and do them good, watch over us, we pray, and cleanse us, from all our sin, in Jesus name, we ask all, Amen, now again, just before we sing, remember, we're going to, whenever we have the benediction, make your way, to the nearest fire exit, even though, it may not be the one, that you usually use, there's no need, to rush from the building, but do take, care, if you're going out, from the, upstairs, fire exits, in case, thankfully, it's dry today, but there might have been, a shower, just in case, they're slippy, but just, there's no, no need to rush, just as we go out, in an orderly, fashion, let us sing, in conclusion, from Psalm 126, and this is, [28 : 35] Psalm 126, from, Sing Psalms, and we sing, from, the whole Psalm, Psalm 126, and the tune is, Denfield, when Zion's fortunes, God restored, it was a dream, come true, our mouths, were then, with laughter, filled their tongues, with songs, anew, the nation said, the Lord has done, great things, for Israel, the Lord, did mighty things, for us, and joy, our hearts, knew well, the whole Psalm, when Zion's fortunes, God restored, when Zion's fortunes, God restored, it was a dream, come true, come as well, then, with laughter, filled, filled, our tongues, with songs, anew, the nation, said, the Lord, has done, great things, for Israel, the Lord, did mighty, things, for us, and for the

hearts, new well, restore, the fortunes, gracious Lord, like streams, in desert soil,
A joyful harvest, as we will harvest, the weeping, sore toil, Toil The man who Bearing Seek to sow
Those that With tears of grief Will Come again With songs Of joy Bearing his Harvest Sheep Now
may the grace, mercy and peace Of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit Rest and abide upon Each
one of you now and forevermore Amen