

Gen 21:8-21 (25:12-18)

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[0 : 0 0] All right, well, would you turn with me to Genesis chapter 21 tonight? We're going to continue in our series looking at the life of Abraham this summer. That's page 15 in the Pew Bible, if you're having trouble finding it.

Genesis chapter 21. Tonight we're going to look at Genesis 21 verses 8 through verse 21. Genesis 21 verses 8 through 21.

Great, let me go ahead and read this for us. Then we'll pray and then we'll dive in. Verse 8. And the child, that's referring to Isaac.

And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.

So she said to Abraham, cast out this slave woman with her son. For the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac. And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.

[1 : 1 0] But God said to Abraham, be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you. For through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also because he is your offspring. So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child.

Then he sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water and the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. And she went and sat down opposite him a good way off about the distance of a bow shot.

For she said, let me not look on the death of the child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 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. Up, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.

[2 : 1 6] And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow.

He lived in the wilderness of Paran. And his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Good. Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful for your word. God, we thank you for this saga of Abraham that we've been studying this summer.

And all that it's been teaching us about your character and your ways in the life of faith. Lord Jesus, we pray that you would continue by your spirit to teach us as your church how to live and to walk in the steps of Abraham.

Our forefather in the faith. We pray this in your name, Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, as we mentioned, the thing that we're considering this summer in the life of Abraham is a theme of trusting God.

What does it mean to trust God? And I think one of the main things we've been seeing over and over again this summer is that trusting God is really more about God than about us.

[3 : 1 8] Trusting God is a lot about seeing that God himself is trustworthy. In other words, the life of faith is really about seeing the God who is faithful. And tonight, we really see that same theme advanced.

God's own trustworthiness, God's own faithfulness is displayed in this text. And I think there are two things happening in this story from Abraham's life that I want to look at tonight.

First, we see that God is preserving here his saving promise. God's preserving his saving promise. And second, we see that God is providing for the outcast.

So God's preserving his promise and he's providing for the outcast. So let's look at both of those things in turn as we kind of dive into this section of Scripture together. So first, let's look at God preserving his promise.

Look at verse 8. In verse 8, we learn that Abraham makes a great feast when Isaac, his son, probably two or three years old at this point, is weaned.

[4 : 17] So he's no longer utterly and completely and totally dependent on his mom. He's sort of hitting that first sort of stage of growth and development. And they throw a big party. Now, Isaac, you'll remember, was the only son of Sarah and Abraham, born to them in their old age.

So this must have been a really special day for them. And here was Isaac making it out of infancy. He was, you know, a lot of children died in infancy in those days. So they threw a great feast. It must have been a really special day for them.

But then in verse 9, if you look at verse 9, Sarah sees Ishmael laughing. Okay, now Ishmael. Ishmael, remember, is the son that Abraham had with Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant.

And that happened back in chapter 16. And you think, well, that's kind of a weird thing. Well, actually, it was Sarah's idea. And Abraham went along with it. So you'll remember, since Sarah and Abraham weren't getting pregnant, Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham kind of as a surrogate so that they might try to have a male child in that way.

So that they could, you know, Sarah was saying, well, maybe we could have a child through my servant. And Ishmael now, fast forward back to chapter 21, is about 16 or 17 years old.

[5 : 32] He's actually a child, yes, but he's a teenager. He's almost on the brink of adulthood. And at this great feast for Isaac, his younger half-brother, Sarah sees him, sees Ishmael laughing.

And if you look in your Bible, if you have an ESV anyway, if you have the ESV translation, the footnote tells us that the sense of that word laughing is most likely that Ishmael was laughing in mockery.

He was sort of making fun of Isaac and sort of ridiculing the whole situation. Now, we're not given any details here in this chapter as to what Ishmael was actually ridiculing.

But I think it's probably safe to say, I think it's a pretty good hypothesis that Ishmael was probably making fun of Isaac's role as Abraham's promised son.

Think about it this way. For the past 16 or 17 years, as we said, for most of Ishmael's life, he has been the only son of Abraham.

[6 : 40] And in the ancient world, the oldest son was the heir. The oldest son was the one who was going to inherit his father's wealth and his father's position and status. Ishmael had even been circumcised in chapter 17 when God commanded Abraham to be circumcised along with his whole family as a sign of God's gracious covenant with them.

And now, on the scene arrives Isaac, a little baby born to elderly Sarah. And Ishmael had been the king of the castle for the past 16 years.

And so, all the hoopla over Isaac gets nothing from Ishmael but laughter and mockery. Surely, this little baby isn't going to take my place in the household, right?

As the oldest son, as the heir. No way. And Sarah sees him mocking. And in verse 10, if you look at verse 10, she tells Abraham, Cast out this slave woman with her son.

For the son of the slave woman shall not be heir with my son, Isaac. Ishmael crossed mama bear, right? And she turns.

[7 : 53] Now, okay, as we read those words, perhaps our first reaction to Sarah is that she's being a little vindictive, a little overprotective. Okay. Yes, there's probably a little unrighteous anger and jealousy here on Sarah's part.

But she actually also sees what's at stake here. Look again. The word heir.

Who will be Abraham's heir? Will it be Ishmael or will it be Isaac? And even Abraham himself is emotionally torn over that question.

Look at verse 11. And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son, on account of his son Ishmael there. Ishmael's Abraham's son. This is his boy for the past 16 to 17 years.

You know, this was the one he took to the office with him on like, bring your son to work day. You know, this was the one he had groomed and built into. This is the one he even circumcised. He's part of the family. Abraham's own heart was perhaps a little unclear about how to figure things out between Ishmael and between Isaac.

[9 : 03] And yet God comes to Abraham. Verse 12. You see, God had been very clear from the very beginning of his dealings with Abraham.

That the covenant, the agreement, the pact, the unbreakable promise that God had made with Abraham to make him a great nation. And to give him a land where that great people could dwell. And to bless all nations through him. That that promise, that saving promise ultimately for the world was going to advance through Isaac.

It was going to advance through the son that God had miraculously given to him and Sarah in their old age when they were past the years of childbearing. It was going to come through the son who could only come through God's own promise and God's own doing.

We see that in chapter 17. If you turn back a page, if you want to look there, starting in verse 15. In this sort of critical moment in Abraham's life, starting in verse 15, God reaffirms his promise that yes, Sarah, even in her old age, will bear a son.

[10 : 26] And that son will be the heir of the covenant. He'll be the one through whom the promises go forward. And even then, Abraham struggles with it. He believes God. He trusts him. And yet he's struggling. He's struggling with it on behalf of Ishmael in 17, 18.

Look at that. Abraham said to God, oh, then Ishmael might live before you. In other words, God, why not just use my son Ishmael to carry forward your saving promises? But God says no. But Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. Or again, as God reaffirms back here in chapter 21 in our text for tonight, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

And so God tells Abraham to do what Sarah says. Make sure, Abraham, that the priority of Isaac, even though he's not the oldest in your household, he's going to be the heir.

He's going to be the one through whom my promise goes. I want you to make sure you preserve that and protect that. So God tells Abraham to do what Sarah says, to send Ishmael and Hagar away.

[11 : 35] And you know, as we said, Sarah's motivations probably were not pure. There was probably some selfishness or maybe even some pettiness in her demand. But God saw that it was for the best. God saw that it was for the best that Ishmael not remain in Abraham's household because it would have made it too difficult for Isaac to be seen as the proper heir of the promise.

Okay, now what does this have to do with us today? Why was God willing to do such a thing? This seems kind of strange, right? Well, if we jump ahead to the New Testament, it helps to shed some light here on what's kind of going on and why this is so important.

You know, it's not only important that Isaac's status be preserved because through him the Messiah was going to come. You know, God had an eternal plan to bring Jesus and it was going to happen through this long and winding road of the family that he created and the family that he chose.

So it was important at this stage in redemptive history that Abraham get clear about where that seed was going to come. It was going to come through Isaac. But in addition to that, the New Testament shows us that there's also an important spiritual lesson going on here.

There's an important spiritual lesson to be seen in the difference between Isaac and Ishmael. In Romans chapter 9, the Apostle Paul looks back to this story in Genesis chapter 21.

[13 : 02] And this is what he says, sort of unpacking this for us. He says, Not all people are children of Abraham just because they're his offspring.

But through Isaac shall your offspring be named. Paul's quoting there this section from Genesis. And this means, Paul goes on to explain, that it's not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise who are counted as offspring.

Okay, let me try to bring this home for us today. Here's the question for us today. How do you and I get into the family of God? How do you and I become God's children and receive God's blessing of knowing him as our father?

Is it because we're born into a so-called Christian family? Is it because we're born into a society, into a nation that's maybe made up of a large number of Christians?

Is that what makes us children of God? Is that how we get into God's family? Through our physical descent? Through the place we're born? That's basically what I thought when I was growing up. [14:15] I remember the first time my family really started going to church in earnest. And it was a church where they would do an altar call every Sunday. Now, if you've only come to Trinity, you have no idea what an altar call is because we never do them.

But this is what it looks like. It looks like at the end of a sermon, the pastor will say, okay, let's have every head bowed and every eyes closed. And we would all bow our heads and close our eyes. And then the pastor would ask some really important questions while we were sort of meditating there in that moment.

Okay, if you think you're a Christian, raise your hand. Okay, so there I am, young person. And I thought, well, yeah, I'm a Christian. What else am I? I'm not Jewish. So, of course, I'm a Christian. What else would I be? My parents say that they're Christian, so I must be one too. Up goes my hand. But friends, that's not how we become children of God. It's not because our parents are believers.

It's not through natural means at all, actually. You see, when Abraham and Sarah couldn't have a child, what they did was they produced a child through natural means, right?

[15:21] They found a young woman, still of childbearing age, Hagar, Sarah's servant, and Abraham produced a son through very natural human effort. He made it happen. But Ishmael, the son born by human effort, by human means, wasn't going to be the one who carried forward God's saving plan.

It was going to be the son that God brought about through his promise and through his work, the one named Isaac. And you see, it's a bit of a parable for today.

The only way into God's family, the only way to become an heir of God's kingdom isn't through our human effort, isn't through our own work, it's through God's work, and it's through God's promise, and it's through God's means, and it's by trusting what he's done.

Not Ishmael, not works, not the family you come from, not the country you were born in, but Isaac, faith in God's promise. And as we know from the New Testament, the promise ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who came and lived a perfectly righteous life in our place, who came and died a sin-bearing death for us as our substitute in our place, so that everyone who trusts in him, regardless of your family background, or your nationality, or where you come from, could be counted righteous and be made part of Abraham's spiritual family, who could be brought into the family of God through faith.

Through the promise, through the work of the Spirit. So here in Genesis 21, the text we're looking at tonight, God is making sure that that reality is preserved crystal clear.

[17:05] God is saying at this important moment in redemptive history, I am going to make a point that will be remembered forever, that getting into my family is by faith and not work, and it's by promise, not by human effort, and not by natural means.

So how about you, friends? As you think about it tonight, on what basis are you thinking God ought to accept you into his family? If you were to be really honest with yourself tonight, if I were to say every head bowed and every eyes closed, why should God accept you into his family?

What would you say? What would be your answer to that? Friends, there's only one right answer to that. And the right answer is because I've put my trust in God's promise fulfilled in Jesus.

It's not your family. It's not how long you've been coming to church. I mean, think about it. Ishmael had been the oldest son for 16 years. He'd put in a lot of time in the family as the oldest son, but that didn't make him the heir in God's economy.

You might have been attending church for twice that long. You know, Isaac or Ishmael was 16. Maybe you've been coming to church for over 30 years. But no amount of church attendance or ministry service or good work is going to make you a son or daughter of God.

[18:30] It doesn't work that way because all of your service, all of your things, it could never make you good enough to enter into God's family. There's only one thing that will bring you in and that's trusting in what God has done for you personally in Jesus.

trusting that he took your sin and trusting that he's given you his righteousness so that you can be forgiven and so that you can be adopted as a child of God apart from your performance, apart from your pedigree, apart from your past so that you can come in by grace because of what he's done.

I don't know about you, but that's really, really good news. That God doesn't look at you and say, okay, you want to be a part of my family? What's your family? Where do you come from? What side of the tracks are you from? Show me your resume if you want to get this job. No. He says, here's how you come into my family. See my one and only son and what he's done for you. Take hold of him and you'll be mine forever and you're in. That's it. Regardless of where you're from, regardless of what you've done. That's good news.

[19 : 44] And it's good news that even way back in Genesis at the very start of God's redemptive plan, he made it clear that his promise was going to come through.

His salvation was going to come through promise and it was going to come through grace and it was going to come through his works and not ours. So that's what's going on in the first part of our text tonight.

But you know, we still have to ask, don't we, as we sort of finish part one, what about Ishmael after all? I mean, what happens to him? If this, you know, text is first about God's preserving his saving promise, well, what else are we supposed to make of it?

Well, the second great thing we see in this text is that we also see here that God provides for the outcast. Now, in order to really feel the weight of what's happening here and the rest of Genesis chapter 21, really from verses, you know, 14 and following, you've got to realize, you've got to feel the weight that God really owes nothing to Ishmael and God owes nothing to Hagar and in reality, God owes nothing to Abraham.

Ishmael, after all, was born out of a foolish and sinful plot of Sarah and Abraham to try to do things their own way. and yet, though God really does owe them nothing, still, what do we see?

[21 : 14] How does God respond to Abraham and Sarah's foolish plan and to this son that they've produced? Does he utterly reject Ishmael and cast him off and say, he was a screw-up, I don't want him in my family?

No. Look at verse 13. God still speaking to Abraham says, yes, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. That's how my sort of covenant-saving promises are going to come to the world, but I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also because he's your offspring.

I'm still going to show him favor. God assures Abraham that he, God, will continue to be merciful to Ishmael and not abandon him. And what happens in the rest of our text tonight?

Abraham gives Hagar and Ishmael some food and water, sends them out into the wilderness, and when Hagar thinks all is lost, she sort of puts her teenage son under a bush to die, goes a sort of bow shot away, cries out to God thinking that all is lost, what happens?

God shows up again. God shows up again for Hagar. It's the second time this has happened in her life. God shows up and he hears. And God, very interestingly, God hears not just Hagar's cry, look again at verse 17, and God heard the voice of the boy.

[22 : 37] God hears not just Hagar, but Ishmael too. God hears the despairing cry of the one who laughed in mockery at God's promised heir.

the one who laughed and ridiculed the heir of the promise. God still in mercy comes to him and hears him. Now, there's some artistry going on here in the Hebrew text of Genesis because the name Isaac literally means laughter, and the name Ishmael means God hears.

In the Old Testament world, names often sort of carried lots and lots of meanings. Isaac means laughter, Ishmael means God hears. So, you see what the text is saying?

It's saying Ishmael, the one who laughed in mockery at the one whose name means laughter while God still in mercy hears the one whose name means God hears. God hears the cry for help.

And then he opens Hagar's eyes to see a well of water nearby, and he rescues both of them, both Hagar and her son. And, as God promised, he makes Ishmael into a great nation.

[23 : 48] If you follow the story of Genesis a little further, you see that the author of Genesis lists Ishmael's descendants and a great company of people come from Ishmael.

You see, when Ishmael was thrown out because of his contempt for Isaac, when Ishmael was made an outcast because he mocked God's plan, God still met him in the wilderness.

He met him in mercy and showed him favor. Now, friends, if that isn't a picture of the good news of the story of the Bible, I don't know what is. Because when we were cast out because of our contempt at God, God comes out into our wilderness, and God opens our eyes to living water, and God keeps his promises to us as people.

Zephaniah 3.19. Zephaniah is an Old Testament prophet who prophesied, who came with God's message to God's people much later in the history of Israel, but in chapter 3.19, God says this through the prophet Zephaniah.

He says, I will save the lame, and I will gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. Friends, that's the God of the Bible.

[25 : 06] That is the one true God, the God who has revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ. This is a God who doesn't ignore our sin, he doesn't excuse our sin, but through his own son and through the cross, he forgives our sin and rescues us.

Now, maybe tonight you kind of feel like an outcast. Maybe through your own actions, something you've done, or maybe through the actions of another, something that someone's done against you. Maybe you feel like you don't belong. Maybe you feel like you don't deserve to belong. Maybe you feel like Ishmael languishing under a tree in the wilderness.

Maybe you feel like Hagar, far away, crying out to God, we're lost. But brothers, sisters, know tonight that God hears.

God hears your cry and know that God has already come out into the wilderness. God has gone out into the far country.

[26 : 17] Jesus Christ came and said, I've come to seek and to save the lost. He's come all the way out into our wilderness to bring the outcasts home.

So the question is, will you come home? Will you receive Him? The one who promises to never leave you or forsake you.

The one who promises to be with you even to the end of the age. The one who said, come to me and I'll give you living water to drink. Not a well in the middle of the wilderness, but a spring that will cause water even within you to flow up.

The one who said, come to me and I'll give you the right to be called a son, a daughter of God. And so then as we wrap up, you see that the two halves of this chapter actually fit together.

God preserves His promise so that He will ultimately provide and protect and care for the outcast.

Friends, God is faithful and God is trustworthy and we can trust Him and we can live a life of faith in Him.

[27 : 26] He's a God who preserves and protects and keeps His promise and He's come for the outcast. Let's pray. Father, we are grateful that You are a merciful God and You keep Your promises.

Lord, You're a God of grace. Father, I pray for my friends who are with me here tonight. Lord, that if there are any here who have not turned to You, Lord Jesus, and received You as the living Son of God who was crucified and raised again for them and for their sins.

Lord, I pray that tonight they would step over the line of faith and put their trust in You, surrender their lives to You, and know that it's not their pedigree and it's not their performance, but it's You, Lord Jesus, that makes them an accepted and a loved child of God.

Lord, for those of us here tonight who understand this and have grasped this by the grace of Your Spirit, help us to live out this great reality that You've loved us and You've accepted us apart from our works in Christ our Savior.

We pray this in His name, Father. Amen.