

Genesis 16

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- [0:00] Let's bow our heads. God in heaven, we thank you so much for this opportunity to be here.
- We thank you for your faithfulness. You are God of wonders beyond our galaxy, and you are holy. We thank you that your faithfulness toward us is new every morning, and that it's great.
- Now, holy God, we pray that you would bless this time, bless the words that I speak. Bless your word, Lord.
- Bless your people here who are here, gathered to hear what you have to say. I pray, Lord God, that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight. I rock and my redeemer.
- In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen. So we're doing Genesis 16, and that is found on page number 11 in your pew Bible.
- [1:01] Hold on, sorry. Organizing. Page number 11 in your pew Bible. And I'm going to start. I'm going to read it. Genesis 16.
- I've got to wait for technology. Sorry. Okay. Starting from verse 1. Now, Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.
- She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And 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. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So after Abram had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar, the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband and his wife, as a wife.
- And he went into Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, may the wrong done to me be on you.
- [2:11] 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.
- But Abram said to Sarai, behold, your servant is in your power. Do to her as you please. Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. The angel of the Lord, verse 7, found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.
- And he said, Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going? She said, I am fleeing from my mistress, Sarai. The angel of the Lord said to her, return to your mistress and submit to her.
- The angel of the Lord also said to her, I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for a multitude. And the angel of the Lord said to her, behold, you are pregnant, and you shall bear a son.
- You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him.

[3 : 22] He shall dwell over against all his kinsmen. So she called the name of the Lord, who spoke to her. You are a God of seeing. For she said, truly here I have seen him who looks after me.

Therefore, the well was called Ber-Lahai-Roi. It lies between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son whom Hagar bore Ishmael.

Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. Come let us sing. Let us rejoice.

Come let us sing. Let us rejoice. Messiah's come. Come let us sing. And he's brought life. And he's put laughter into my soul.

It would have been enough if he brought peace. It would have been enough if he brought joy. It would have been enough if he brought life.

[4 : 34] But he put laughter into my soul. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Hey, hey, hey, hey.

Ho, ho, ho, ho. Messiah's come. And he's brought life. And he's put laughter into my soul.

When thinking about our narrative, and particularly Hagar, this song came to mind because it seemed to me that during the journey depicted here in our text, Hagar was being given a new song to sing.

And this new song began with an unexpected encounter with the living God who would, who gave her more, who would give her more than she bargained for. God gave Hagar a new song.

Now, before we get to Hagar's new song, we need to know what her old song was. Well, in verse 2, we find that Sarai, Hagar's mistress, had a bright idea.

[5 : 42] She was understandably frustrated that she's not giving birth to the offspring that was promised by God. But she was getting up there in age, so she decides to take matters into her own hands.

Now, when we find Sarai, she's at least a decade past since this promise was given. And she was way past the childbearing age, according to the text.

Sarai decides to use her servant girl, more accurately slave girl, as a surrogate womb, so to speak. And offers her to Abram so that she can obtain a child through that union.

The plan then backfires because when Hagar conceived, she then subsequently begins to look upon Sarai with contempt. One version says that once she conceived that Sarai became despised in her sight.

This leads to a complaint to Abram, who also, if you notice, refers to Hagar by slave girl or servant girl, who then refuses to take responsibility for the situation. And then now back to Sarai, dealing harshly with Hagar.

[6 : 50] And then Hagar, with the baby in her womb, runs away, actually flees to the wilderness. So, what was Hagar's song?

We can maybe gather from this chain of events that Hagar's song at the beginning of the narrative was most likely a progenitor or ancestor of the blues.

Here's what I mean. The blues, for those who are not familiar with what the blues are, is a genre of music that has deep roots in American history, particularly African-American history.

The blues originated in the Deep South, specifically Mississippi, Delta region after the American Civil War. Its inventors were ex-slaves and the descendants of slaves.

Basically, they were African-American sharecroppers and their descendants. But I say this to make a point that the blues music arose out of a context of oppression. It's interesting if you think about it because the Hebrew word used in verse 6 to describe how Sarai treated Hagar is the same word used in Exodus to describe Israel's oppression of Egypt.

[8:01] Or Israel's oppression, I'm sorry, by Egypt. So, Hagar is escaping an unjust, unbearable, oppressive situation.

It may not only be unjust and unbearable, but may even be a situation, consider this, that put her life or the life of her unborn child in danger.

But how do you know? Remember that in verse 6, Abram said to Sarai, he gave Sarai like the green light when she said, when he said, no, your slave girl's in your power.

Do to her as you please. Now, we do not know the degree of the affliction or oppression that came from Sarai, but when things got going, we can assume that for Hagar, she felt it was better to take her chances surviving the wilderness as a pregnant woman than to stick around and take her chances surviving Sarai.

So, she was out of here. Now, that was loud. Now, she finds herself in the wilderness.

[9:12] And here she has, and this is the first stop, an unexpected encounter and the beginnings of her receiving a new song. So, first, an unexpected encounter.

Now, she's on her way to a place called Shur. She's headed back to her homeland since Shur is somewhere in the northeast Egypt and she is Egyptian. But she is really going nowhere.

How do we know this? Well, before answering this question, let's look for a moment in how the situation in the wilderness unfolds. First, she encounters the angel of the Lord. Now, we learn in verse 13 that this is really Yahweh who's speaking to her.

It is God in human form. It is God in human form. It is the first theophany we see in Scripture. And what is important to observe is that he, the angel of the Lord, engages her by calling her by her name.

This is important because in encountering God, she's immediately made aware of her value. She is somebody. She is not the slave girl. She has a name.

[10:22] In Psalm 8, 3 through 5, the psalmist writes, When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have ordained, what is man that you take thought of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him a little lower than God or heavenly beings. One virgin said the angels. And you crown him with glory and majesty. So by calling her her name, God shows that he is mindful of her.

That he cares for her. And that he cares about her personally. This is especially interesting to think about when you consider that the personal meaning of her name is stranger.

Now, unlike Sarai referencing her as my slave girl or Abram doing the same, when he says to Sarai, she is your slave girl. The angel of the Lord, on the other hand, when he meets her at the wilderness, calls out to her and says, Hagar.

And just in case she did not realize the angel of the Lord was speaking to the right Hagar, he says, Hagar. Slave girl of Sarai.

[11:35] Yes, I'm talking to you. It's as if she was looking around like, who's he talking to? But he made the point to point out, no, no, I'm talking to you, Hagar. Now, I mentioned earlier that Hagar is going nowhere.

And we can see this in how the author tells the story. Yes, she is going home to Egypt, but she's literally going nowhere. The angel of the Lord asks her, where is she coming from?

And where is she going to? But notice that she only answers where she's coming from. The Bible tells us that she's on her way to Shur, which is an area in Egypt where she is from.

And the word literally means wall. I don't know how many people ever ran track and field, you know. But I ran track in high school. I was good at it, but I didn't love it.

And I had to run a race called a 400-meter sprint. Anybody ever run a 400-meter sprint? And if you've never hit a wall before, you're going to hit one in that.

[12:41] And I remember there was a guy named, God rest his soul, named Jeff Dingle. He was basically a great football player and a great track guy. I ran a 400-meter.

He ran a 400-meter. He's from another high school. And we were in counties. And I remember I took off in the finals. And I just remember this as vividly as if it was yesterday. I'm running.

And you typically, if you know anything about 400 meters, you hit the wall somewhere in the last 110 meters, 120 meters. When you hit the wall, what happens is your body just, you know, in your mind, mentally, you know, you still see the goal.

You're still trying to go somewhere. But your body is basically, you know, is not giving you any help. And typically when you're running, you hit that wall and you know you have to finish. And you hear everybody else coming. You start to hear the cleats start tracking through the track.

And basically you end up, you know, you lose all energy. You lose all strength. So hitting the wall, you're really just, you're moving but you're really going nowhere. That's the point I'm trying to make. So Shur is in a region on Egypt's northeast border.

[13:42] And it was probably named after the wall that the Egyptians built to protect their border. But to put it another way, I think this depicts the clarity and brilliance of the God-inspired biblical writer. And that we can see that if you're running from where the Lord wants you to be and needs you to be, then you and I, like Hagar, are in fact running into or towards a wall.

And that's the point. Ooh, I'm yelling into this. So let me say that again. If we're running from where the Lord wants us to be and needs us to be, then you and I, like Hagar, are in fact running into or running towards a wall.

So she's really running into a wall. Hagar is going nowhere. Now when the angel of the Lord encounters her, not only does he know her name, but we see that he's intimately familiar with her song.

God knows our song. How do we know this? In verse 11, the angel of the Lord says to Hagar, he has given heed to her affliction or misery, her suffering.

Another translator writes, the Lord has listened to your affliction. In fact, God wants to make sure that Hagar never forgets that he heard because God takes it upon himself to name her son for her.

[15:08] God names him Ishmael, which means God hears. God sees, but God hears too. God, like with Hagar, hears the genre of our song.

And in this case, we see that God is intimately familiar with blues type music. Meaning a sound that flows out of affliction and pain. And it is clear from the text that affliction has a sound because God said, no, I heard your affliction.

Suffering has a sound and God hears it. Suffering has a sound. Affliction has a sound. And God hears it. It could be the sound of melancholy or sadness and sadness.

A sound of pain, both physical, psychological, and emotional. It could be a sound of unfulfilled hopes and dreams that are stifled or hindered in the context of oppression or affliction that make you wonder if God even cares.

But he does care. Now, because this is God or Yahweh, he knows something about the situation that Hagar does not know.

[16 : 20] So he does something that seems strange in that he tells her to go back to Sarai and to submit to her. Knowing her fears, knowing what drove her into the wilderness, to take her chances with the elements.

But even as God does this, he immediately gives her hope. He does it, but he gives her hope right away. Whatever she may have went through with Sarai, God is basically making it clear to her that no matter what she was going through or what she would grow through when she returned, that it would not kill her, nor would it kill her unborn child.

The angel of the Lord makes it clear that she will survive and that she would do so because an entire nation is counting on her survival.

She's not just having a baby. There's an entire nation in her womb through Ishmael. And God's a God of his word.

Can you imagine being sent back into a situation that's unbearable? What I've learned about those is those are typically those counter-blessing situations.

[17 : 40] I remember for about a year before I came out here, and I was thankful for the job, but I don't know if anybody had to do a job. Even though you're thankful for the job, but it was a very difficult situation.

I had to do a job, and I'll tell you what it is, and I'm going to tell you the blessing I learned from it. Because I had to count my blessings. I had to do this job, and it's funny because the guy who typically, the regional manager said one time in a meeting, he said it was sales.

He said, no one grows up saying this is what they're going to do. This is the industry they're going to work in. And it was pest control. I had to sell pest control to businesses. Now, if you know anything about pest control and sales, you have to, first of all, you have to take a test to basically do.

You have to know all the bugs, and you have to know everything about rats and bugs. Anything you can think of you don't like that's a pest, you got to learn about it. I did it in California. There were two different tests I had to take.

One test was, there was a termite test. I didn't have to take that, but if I stuck around long enough, I would have to take it. And there was one for just other pests. Taking a test is nothing. Going in and doing inspections.

[18 : 55] Having a rat jump two feet from your face. Especially if you're, I'm not a country guy, so I have friends who are country boys and country girls, and they're a little bit more at ease with dealing with pests and things that happen like that.

I'm a city guy. So, basically, city guys don't like rats. But the bottom line was, I had to do that for a year. I had to do it in a very sort of dysfunctional context.

I was grateful, but it was hard. It was unbearable. Now, let me tell you what the blessing was from it in hindsight. Now, I know right now, you put a house or business in front of me, I know how to pest proof it.

You do a building. I don't care. I've done like 100 apartments or 100 unit apartment building, a stand, food stand, a food truck, whatever.

I know how to pest proof stuff now. Just based on that experience. That's a blessing. Because now, when I buy a house, I should never have pests, right?

[20 : 03] Well, anyway, that's my illustration. Unbearable situation. Blessing in that unbearable situation. Now, he sends her back. Hagar, into that situation.

That's unbearable. But we have to imagine that there was something the angel of the Lord said that brought peace to her heart. She was sent back into a difficult situation, and she was being given the grace to handle it.

Theologian Howard Thurman once said in reference to the African-American struggle for civil rights, we had to handle our suffering instead of being handled by it. So she was being sent back with the grace of God to handle her suffering, whatever came from it.

We don't know if it changed. We don't know if it stayed the same as opposed to being handled by it. But the Lord was with her. I imagine that what made the thought of returning easier to bear was the fact that the angel of the Lord gave her a clear vision for where her life was going, a vision that she never imagined before.

She just thought she was having a baby. But again, you know, he's telling her, you're going to have a nation. Again, God revealed to Hagar what she had inside of her was not simply a baby. It was a nation.

[21:07] Here she is minding her own business and maybe thinking, cool, I'm about to have the son of Abram. But God was going far beyond such thinking. He was doing what the scripture tells us and demonstrates to us that the God who is no respecter of persons, who shows no partiality or favoritism, is capable and willing to do for those who trust him and take him at his word, which is Ephesians 3.20 declares, God is able to do far more abundantly.

No, we can ask or think. Hagar learned this. So whatever Hagar may have been thinking about her future, God flipped the script in her thinking.

He surprised her. He brought life to her. He brought peace to her. He brought joy to her. And quite possibly, much like he did Abram and Sarai later on, he put laughter in her soul.

He gave her a new song. It was no longer the blues in an ancient Near Eastern sort of way. Now, he gave Hagar a vision that would make the struggle for her present more bearable, of her present more bearable.

In her heart, she now had a sense of destiny that she may not have had before, and that would change her song. God gave her a new song. What was this song?

[22:22] Well, we need to look at another dimension of what the angel of the Lord does in this encounter before answering that question. Looking at verse 13, the narrator tells us in this verse, reading from English Standard Version, so he called the name of the Lord.

So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her. You are a God of seeing. For she said, truly, here I have seen him who looks after me. God sees Hagar.

I remember one time when I had a young lady I was dating in L.A., and she used to say this to me, and I never really got it until now I get it now. And she would say, Evan, when something went wrong, Evan, you're not seeing me.

And it always would stress me out because I was like, well, what am I not doing? But now I know what she meant, you know? And here's my point. Before Hagar got her new song, we have to understand that God knew the song that would be best for Hagar.

Oftentimes, certain songs work best in certain contexts. You know, like if I had iTunes, I'm working out a certain song I play in my workout. It won't be the same song. It depends on my mood. But God knew where she was and knew that the song that she needed at that moment in time or the song that she would respond to.

[23:35] Now, how many people can think of their favorite song? It's hard to pick a favorite song for most of us. Sometimes what we want to hear will depend on our mood, like I said.

But some songs will have you rocking out in the car. Some will have you lift your hands in praise. Some may make you cry, tears of joy type of crying or laugh or a sad song because Hagar is singing a sad song when God meets her on her way to Shur.

But when she goes back to Abram and Sarai, we have to assume that her song has changed. And we have to assume that she's not going back with the same sad bluesy song, but a song of life, a song of vision, and a song of hope.

And what we may have really, what may have really done it for Hagar, what may have really been the icing on the cake was God seeing her. God seeing her.

What I mean. Well, the word see here speaks of a specific type of seeing. It is the idea of gazing at someone.

[24:42] In fact, it's an extremely intentional type of gazing. It's the type of intentional seeing where you're almost looking through someone, but it is done with affection and admiration.

It's a gaze. God's looking at you. But he's looking at you a certain type of way with affection and admiration. It's like having someone that you love around you.

A significant other, your child, and you just can't stop looking at them. And you want to do whatever you can to look out for them, love them, and care for them. And this morning, I got a chance to hang out with my goddaughter.

She's three. And when she came up to me, she ran up to me. I haven't seen her in a while. And she buried her head in my leg and gave me a hug. And the time I spent with her, I left there saying, leaving there thinking, I want to look out for that girl.

She's three. I want to be that person who looks out for her. You know? So I had that, I guess that gaze in sort of an Evan sort of way on my three-year-old goddaughter. So God is looking at her with affection and admiration.

[25:50] Hagar was able to recognize this type of gaze from God because she walked away knowing that God loved her and that God cares. There's a song I used to listen to in college, even before I was serving God.

And it always struck me. It was a song called God Cares by Sounds of Blackness. Lyrics go, God cares all about you. And he'll be there to see you through.

And when no one will comfort you, he'll care about you. God cares all about you. And he'll be there when you're feeling blue. And when your life has broken you, he'll care about you.

In the gaze of God, Hagar knew God cared. So even before she leaves the wilderness, Hagar knows that she will be all right.

She knows that she is loved. She knows that this God who has revealed himself to her cares deeply about her. Her statement in verse 13 implies that she knows that God would also look out for her, look after her.

[26:58] Because even after she has seen this God, and in ancient Eastern culture, you were not expected to see God and live. She experienced God's grace. And because of all these things, she becomes assured that not only will she survive and that her baby will survive, but add a whole nation that she's birthing into the mix.

And you have to understand that she even understands that her life will never be the same again. God gave her a new song. You see, God's a giver of songs.

God's a great songwriter. A brilliant lyricist who will gaze into our souls and create the songs just for you and for me. God wants to get the glory, all the glory for our song.

God even does this with Hagar by making sure that in the process of this vision that he has given her, being worked out in her life, that she will never forget that the beautiful song she now has came from her encounter with him.

Like he did for Hagar, God will leave us something to remember his grace by day in and day out. Morning by morning, we will see new mercies. God will never give us leftover mercy. My pastor used to say that in the late, he said, God doesn't give us leftover mercy.

[28:17] Every morning he gives us brand new mercy. For Hagar, it would be Ishmael and the nation that would follow. And I am sure much more than that, than it's mentioned here.

These would be blessings to remember God's mercy by for Hagar. And this will also come to understand that, like, understand like Hagar that, that God's grace is not only a merited favor or a generous gift, but it is.

And I always said this, say this all the time, it's indescribably kind. God's grace is indescribably kind. God's grace is indescribably kind. You see, in Hagar and even Sarai, who assumed that God was not going to bless her like she would with a son, this is Sarai, know how the limited knowledge in a person's current circumstance, in both current circumstances, their limited knowledge, can limit their view of God and his grace and then imprison them to a point, even a point where we can see Hagar and Sarai in their relationship, the drama interrupted.

And we, we, you and I, will do no better if we're not taking God at his word. But even then, we see that an all-powerful, all-knowing God can usurp consequences, the consequences of our finite perspectives, and gives us a new song to sing.

God can usurp the consequences of our finite perspectives, and gives us, give us a new song to sing.

[30:05] There's a song, it's funny, I heard a while back, and this, as I was writing this, it's reminding me of it. There's a song called His Favorite Song of All. I don't know if you're familiar with it.

It's written by the, well, I don't know if it's written by the Brooklyn Tide, but it's sung by them. And the lyrics go, but His favorite song of all, you're familiar with it, I sing it. It's a song of the redeemed.

When lost sinners are now made clean, lift their voices loud and strong. When those purchased by His blood lift to Him a song of love.

Nothing more He'd rather hear, nor so pleasing to His ear as His favorite song of all. In closing, the question begs again.

What is Hagar's new song? In our most modern context, I imagine the lyrics could have went something like this.

[31:12] In the stars, His handiwork I see. On the wind, He speaks with majesty, though He ruleth over land and sea.

What is that to me? I will celebrate nativity, for it has a place in history. Sure, He came to set His people free. What is that to me?

Till I met the Savior, or till I met Him face to face, and I felt the wonder of His grace.

Then I knew that He was more than just a God who didn't care. That lived a way out there, and now He walks beside me day by day.

Ever watching on me lest I stray. Helping me to find the narrow way. He's everything to me. I imagine that if Hagar chose to continue to walk with God who saw her, like really, truly saw her, then this would be Hagar's new song.

[32:21] A song of deliverance, salvation, purpose, grace. From a God who cares. And from a God who hears the sound of your suffering and sees all.

God bless you. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Holy God, we just want to thank you for your faithfulness again.

We thank you once again that you hear our song, Lord God. You hear our affliction. You respond. You hear. You see. You pour out your grace on us.

Lord, we know that even as we go forward into the week, Lord, we've come in sort of to your presence with challenges out there. And we're going back to some of the same challenges, Lord God. Some of which might be unbearable.

But God, we thank you for your grace that allows us to bear up under those challenges, Lord God. We thank you for your mercy.

[33 : 25] We thank you for your power, Lord God, through the power of the Holy Spirit to have victory over those same unbearable situations. We thank you, Lord God, for your salvation in Jesus Christ that gives us hope in a world, Lord God, that's full of nihilism, Lord God.

And tend to sort of lean toward hopelessness, Lord God. But as your church, we know we have hope. And that hope has power. Lord, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for what you've done, what you're doing right now. What you're going to do as we go forward, Lord God, trusting that you know our song. Trusting that in Christ you gave us a new song.

And we can walk in that with our heads held high, knowing, Lord God, that we have the victory in Jesus. Thank you, Lord God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.