

The Life of Abraham: A Journey of Faith – Part 12

Dealing with Past Mistakes – Genesis 21:8-34

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – March 27th, 2022

Intro:

- I have this little patch of ground between my garage and our back fence. A few years ago, I decided to grow a small number of things there if I could. With the help of a friend, we tilled up the ground, added some fertilizer and soil, and planted my seeds. It took a while for those seeds to grow. I had to wait and water, wait and water, wait and water, until the seeds of hope started to grow. And grow they did, along with other things that were in the soil: weeds. I did not intentionally plant the weeds, but up they came in abundance. Now that my seeds had started to grow, I had to add another task to my list, weeding. So I watered and waited and weeded until my tomatoes were ripe, my cucumbers were formed, and my dill had grown tall. It was a process that took continual care, and it was a labor of love and sometimes just labor.
- I don't know if they were the best tomatoes and cucumbers in the world, but they tasted so to me, perhaps because of all the work I put into them or because they were fresh, backyard-produced. I enjoyed the fruit of my labor and the seeds I had planted. The hard work in the summer heat had paid off. What is true of my garden is also true of our lives. What is planted will grow; whether it is watermelon or weeds, we will reap what we sow. In this point in the story of the lives of Abraham and Sarah, they are in a time of harvest. After the first seeds of promise had been planted in their hearts and after 25 years of waiting, the son of the promise had finally been born. What was impossible became possible through the God who keeps His promises. They laughed and marveled in the joy that God produced through them. There was great joy and celebration because of this son. This was the first thing they had harvested because of waiting on the promises of God and the miracle He brought to life.
- However, Isaac was not the only thing they were harvesting. They also had some weeds that had grown in their garden that they needed to deal with because of the sin in the soil of their hearts. All of us have made mistakes in our lives, things we wish we could take back, seeds that we wish we would not have sown. Today, from Abraham and Sarah's lives, we will learn how to deal with the missteps, misdeeds, and mistakes of our past.

Protect what is most precious

Genesis 21:8-10 NIV

The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. 9 But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, 10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

- So at this moment in time, Isaac was around the age of 3, and Ishmael, the son of Hagar, who was to be a "wild donkey of a man" (Gen. 16:12), was around the age of 14. There was a huge celebration held for the transition of Isaac from an infant to a child. Isaac was the center of attention that day, with family and friends gathering from all around. Unfortunately, while all the people were celebrating and honoring this child, there was one who was not, his half-brother

Ishmael. Instead of honoring and celebrating, Ishmael was mocking and belittling this small and vulnerable child.

- We don't know exactly what was said, but kids can be cruel, especially those who have just reached puberty, like some of us experienced in junior high. Abraham and Sarah had made mistakes through lack of judgment and wandering from the good path of faith, and the result of those mistakes reared its taunting head. What was most precious to them, their son Isaac, the fruit of the promise of God, was in jeopardy and in danger. Instead of being honored and treasured, Isaac was mocked and ridiculed. Finally, Sarah, Isaac's mother, had enough. This was not the first time this had happened, but she was bound to make it the last time. How could Ishmael continue to do this, even on this day of all days? Sarah told her husband Abraham to get right of this boy and his mom.

Genesis 21:11-13 NIV

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. 12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. 13 I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

- Abraham was greatly distressed because he loved his son, and some of the mistakes in our past we dearly love. But he recognized that the issues and problems were getting bigger and more dangerous, and they robbed them of joy and peace and threatened to harm the product of the promises of God in their lives. So Abraham was in deep distress and consulted God about what he should do.
- God told Abraham to release the boy and this woman because what he and Sarah had through the promise was more important, the highest priority, and the promise for the future. God said that He would take care of what Abraham let go of. Would Abraham love God more and trustingly abandon all and follow Him?
- There are times in our lives when we have to deal with and reconcile with our past. We have to decide what matters most in our lives and let go of what we have held onto in order to grasp what is best. Sometimes this comes in the form of relationships, and sometimes, it comes in the forms of dreams and locations or practices. If we are unwilling to let go of some people and some practices and some places, we will put the promises of God in jeopardy and never fully enter the good that God has for us.

Genesis 21:14 NIV

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

- I am sure this was a hard parting, but Abraham had made up his mind and did what was difficult, trusting God for a better future and trusting what was once precious to him, to God. We have to do the same thing from our past mistakes in our lives. We have to make a break from them, and a hard break, knowing that God will be able to take care of them as we trust Him for a better future. Is what you have from God more valuable than anything and anyone else? Even in this, we have to trust God and decide what is most precious to us.

- Abraham made his choice and protected what was most precious so that it would grow into fullness and maturity. For us, it may mean that we have to part ways with those who look to poison the precious things of God. We have to let them go and entrust them to God as well, doing the best we can for them and letting them go to His care. This may cause pain in others also, but you must move forward in what God has called you to do.
- Hagar and Ishmael suffered from the separation because of sin. However, God did provide for them and was true to His promise for them. God answered their cries for help and provided what they needed to live. Eventually, Hagar went back to Egypt, the place where she was from, and found a wife for Ishmael (See Genesis 21:15-21).
- These things happened because of Abraham and Sarah not trusting God and living in fear and striving for their own self-protection. They went to Egypt to "save themselves" and lived a lie for self-protection. They were now dealing with the fruit of their actions and needed to make a change. We can save ourselves the pain of this process by continuing to trust God and walk according to His ways. If we don't, we will have to painfully deal with our sin's consequences. We have to either separate from them, or continue to have problems from them and jeopardize the weeds overcoming the good fruit. Make the hard choice, and trust God for a better future.
- The next weed they had to deal with growing in the garden of their life was the same lie for the same reason which they told to a different man, Abimelek. God in His goodness allowed them to redeem themselves from this lie, but they had to pay the price to set things right. The next thing we need to do in dealing with our past mistakes is to pay the price to redeem our reputation.

Pay the price to redeem your reputation

Genesis 21:22-24 NIV

At that time Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. 23 Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you." 24 Abraham said, "I swear it."

- Abimelek had already been lied to by Abraham and Sarah and paid the price for it (see Genesis 20). Abimelek saw that God was with Abraham, which allowed Abraham to redeem his reputation. Abimelek was burned once and was not going to be burned again. Abimelek brought a powerful man with him to witness the conversation, so he would have evidence of what had happened. He made Abraham "swear to God" that he would not lie to him, his family, or any of his descendants again. Abimelek made Abraham swear that he would treat him and his people with the same kindness he had shown him.
- All of this was the consequence of Abraham's deception, bringing someone to witness, making him swear to God that he would not lie, and to treat Abimelek as he treated Abraham, and it was to his shame that these actions needed to be done. Abraham had to "eat crow" and promise to God that he would change and do better. Abraham had another opportunity to make things right by the grace of God, and Abimelek extended his trust and gave him another opportunity to do what was right. Abraham had to humble himself, and we also have to humble ourselves to put things right with people we have harmed to regain trust and relationships.
- Abraham, after humbling himself, had an issue that he needed to bring to Abimelek's attention for things to be right between the two.

Genesis 21:25-31 NIV

Then Abraham complained to Abimelek about a well of water that Abimelek's servants had seized. 26 But Abimelek said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."

27 So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelek, and the two men made a treaty. 28 Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, 29 and Abimelek asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?" 30 He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well."

31 So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

- Because Abraham had dealt falsely with them, the servants of Abimelek had dealt falsely with him. Abraham wanted to set this right. In order to do so, it cost Abraham. He gave sheep and cattle to Abimelek to "buy back" what was taken, and in order to make a proper covenant (by halving animals (see Genesis 15)). Not only did he have to restore trust, but he had to pay back for the damage he had done (note that Abimelek gave payment to Abraham in Genesis 20).
- Then as a witness that Abraham had set things right, it cost him some of his most valuable possessions, ewe lambs (young female lambs which were the most valuable because they could reproduce for a long time). He gave 7 of them, one for each day of the week and the number of completion. It may cost you to restore your reputation. This may take the form of doing difficult things on the job or in a relationship, but do what you must to restore yourself to good standing. It will cost you, but it will be worth it, and it will be right in the sight of God and people. If you took something, pay it back, be it items, time, or breaking of trust. Pay the price to redeem your reputation and to put relationships right. Is there anyone that you need to do this with?
- They named the place "Beersheba," which means the oath of the seven lambs. This was as a marker, a reminder of what they have sworn to do. You may need to do the same, to remind yourself of the words you have sworn. And sometimes, our scars serve as reminders as well. Here is an interesting paradox: sometimes, we need to be wounded in order to heal. Sometimes we need to be cut in order to be made whole.
- The last thing to do is to plant yourself in the promises, to put your roots down in the plan and promises of God.

Plant yourself in the promises

Genesis 21:32-34 NIV

After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. 33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. 34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

- Abraham planted a tree. He was no longer a visitor on someone's land, and he became a permanent resident. Planting a tree means that you intend to stay in the place where you are. It takes a long time for a tree to grow. This action was indicative that he now was planting himself

in the land of promise, no longer to roam to other places. He was going to put his roots down and stay permanently in the place and provision of God. Saying, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

- Plant yourself firmly in the promises of God. Throw your lot in with Him and His people. Let your roots grow deep in the soil of the kingdom. May you dig a well into the word that will give you life. Plant yourself in His promises, and may nothing nor no one move you. May what is written the opening of the Psalms be true of you.

Ps 1:1-3 ESV

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

- May you always call on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God, and remain all of your life in the land of the Lord and dwell in His house forever.

Conclusion

- We do reap what we sow, both the good and the bad. Deal with the weeds, enjoy the fruit of the word of God in your heart, actively attend to it, and benefit from the results. Do the work you need to do to set things right and continue to call on the name of the everlasting God, who deserves all honor and praise for His eternal goodness to every generation. I hope you live in the shade of our tree planted in the land of the Lord.