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Sermon Notes

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The Fruit of Faithlessness: Abram, Sarai, and Hagar

Genesis 16:1-16

I. The Test of Faith: Sarai's Barrenness and Bad Advice (vs. 1-2)

vs. 1-2 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

A. Stunning Contrast: "Abram Believed the Lord" vs. "Abram listened to the voice of Sarai"

1. Bible consistently honest about the failings of its heroes

- a. Noah gets drunk and lies naked in his tent
- b. David commits adultery with Bathsheba and conspires to kill Uriah
- c. Elijah gets worn out and depressed in his battle with Jezebel and yearns for death
- d. Hezekiah becomes prideful in his later years
- e. John the Baptist has doubts about whether Jesus is the Christ
- f. a moment after Peter says "You are the Christ," he rebukes Jesus for saying He would die on the cross and Jesus says "Get behind me Satan" to Peter
- g. the disciples are constantly arguing about which of them is the greatest, even the very night before Christ would die

2. Lesson is consistent and clear:

Jesus said it this way: "No one is good but God alone."

Paul said it this way: "There is no one righteous, not even one."

3. When all is said and done, everyone, including a great man like Abram, will be saved by grace through faith, if they are to be saved at all

4. So: Genesis 15... a mountaintop experience of faith; but soon the trial of Genesis 16 comes

B. Abram's Faith Repeatedly Tested

1. Faith tested at the start: would he leave his country and his father and go to the land God would show him?
2. Faith tested as soon as he got to the Promised Land by a severe famine: would he trust God as Provider, or flee to Egypt
3. Faith tested in Egypt: would he trust God as Protector, or would he lie about Sarai and call her his sister
4. Faith tested when he returned to Promised Land in the conflict with Lot: would he be selfish or trust God for the land in the future
5. Faith tested when Lot was abducted in the battle of the kings in Genesis 14: would he show courage in battle and love for his nephew
6. Faith tested when the battle was won and the King of Sodom offered him plunder from the war: would his greed kick in or would he remain faithful to God

C. The Rhythm of Faith's Trials

1. After the mountaintop experience comes the Valley of Testing
2. After Abram finally leaves Terah, his father and enters the Promised Land, then comes the famine
3. After Abram finally restores his walk with God upon returning to the Promised Land, that's when the conflict with Lot flares up
4. After he's won a battle with courage and amazing skill, and after Melchizedek comes out and blesses Abram, that's precisely when the King of Sodom tempts him with plunder
5. And now, after the mountaintop of Genesis 15's starry night promise and somber covenant ceremony comes the next trial

A.W. Pink: "It is God's usual pattern to bless, and then to test. It is thus highly necessary for us to take the lesson to heart. It is when we have received some special mark of the Lord's favor, or immediately after we have enjoyed some unusual season of communion with Him, that we need most to be on our guard."

D. Abram's Most Severe Test: Waiting on the Promise of God

1. All these tests were as nothing compared to the next one

2. Would Abram wait on God to fulfill the magnificent promise He made to him under the starry night sky: **“So shall your offspring be.”**
3. Would Abram simply trust God to fulfill His word, or would he take matters into his own hands, or become depressed and desperate when year after year passed with no change
4. Waiting is what the flesh MOST HATES to do... man wants to be “master of his fate, captain of his soul”
5. At this point in the story, Abram has been waiting ten years for the promise of God to come true concerning an heir... he still has another fifteen years to go!!!
6. The pattern of trials of faith he’s already faced will be as nothing compared to this next trial
7. Shockingly, the instrument of the next temptation to unbelief would be his own lovely and cherished wife, Sarai... the problem was he barrenness, and her bad advice

E. Sarai’s Barrenness

vs. 1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

vs. 2 so she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children.”

1. Like Abram, she considers children a direct gift from God... therefore barrenness a direct act of God
2. In this, they were right... God wisely mixes together the ingredients of our lives—not too much blessing and not too much trial

Sarai had amazing physical beauty, a godly husband, material wealth, and godly character. But she was barren according to God’s sovereign plan

3. God chooses

Exodus 4:11 The LORD said to him, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

4. God’s purposes: Greater glory for Himself in the end!!!

God intended to glorify himself by waiting until Abraham’s body was as good as dead, since he would be about one hundred years old, and until Sarah’s womb was also dead

Why? To demonstrate that He is the God that gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they are. This is exactly what Paul said in Romans 4:17... to prove that He is a mighty, powerful God who can do anything

F. Sarai's Bad Advice

1. Sarai had a female servant named Hagar, who was an Egyptian
2. Probably she was among those servants that Pharaoh had given them as a gift when he had thought to take Sarai as a wife in Genesis 13
3. Sarai saw that she continued to be barren, and wanted to take action
4. Common practice of the day... the female servant belonged to Sarai, so any child she bore would be reckoned as Sarai's
5. Later, Rachel and Leah will do the same thing with their female servant, giving them to Jacob to have children by them
6. This was culturally correct, but it was not godly
7. There are many examples of polygamy in the Bible, but NEVER and examples of happy polygamy... it's always a disaster!! It always results in great strife and conflict
8. God's pattern for marriage was set in the Garden of Eden

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

9. It was Lamech who first broke this pattern in Genesis 4... and he was a wicked man

G. The Danger of Bad Advice from a Wife

1. A godly wife is among God's greatest gifts to a godly man
2. Her great assistance to her husband comes in every possible area of his life and work... physical needs met, mental needs met, companionship needs met... she is a blessing to him in every way
3. Perhaps the greatest comes in her godly advice... in godly counsel in times of trial
4. Therefore, a wife can also do great damage to a godly man by giving him ungodly advice

Matthew Henry: "It is the policy of Satan to tempt us by our nearest and dearest relations, or those friends that we have on opinion of and an affection for. The temptation is most dangerous when it is sent by a hand that is least suspected: it is our wisdom, therefore, to consider not so much who speaks, but what is spoken."

II. The Failure of Faith: Abram Acts Without Prayer (vs. 3-4)

A. Abram's Failure of Faith: Listening to Sarai, Not to God

1. God had clearly defined marriage, despite the cultural norms
2. God made His promise clear
3. Sarai's barrenness should have been a cause for greater faith

"The God who made the stars and calls them each by name can certainly give me a son by my barren wife, Sarai."

B. Hints in the Text

1. "After Abram had lived ten years in Canaan...": subtle hint at worldliness
2. NOTE: The official titles: "Sarai, Abram's wife"

vs. 3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, I) Abram's wife, took Hagar II) the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram III) her husband IV) as a wife.

God is upholding their positions even in the way the account is written

C. Abram's Possible Train of Thought

1. God has promised me an heir from my own body
2. God has NOT openly promised that the heir would come from Sarai
3. It is culturally acceptable to have a child in Sarai's name by Hagar
4. Clincher: Sarai is even the one suggesting it!!!
5. Therefore, it MUST be okay to do it

D. Isaac's Superior Example

1. Isaac never married another woman, but was a one-woman man his whole life
2. Rebekah had the same problem as Sarai had had...
3. Isaac's answer was what Abram's should have been

Genesis 25:21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

III. The Fruit of Faithlessness: Broken Relationships (vs. 4-6)

- A. Initially Good Fruit: A Child to Come!
- B. BUT Bitter Fruit Settles In
- C. Broken Relationship #1: Hagar and Sarai

vs. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

1. Probably Hagar thought her position had now changed
2. She would be the mother of Abram's heir... Sarai's equal, if not her superior
3. At this point, pride began to seep into her attitude

Matthew Henry: "It is a hard thing to bear honor properly."

4. "Despise" in Hebrew = disdain, or make light of
5. Perhaps it began with delayed obedience; then with some facial expressions of disdain, or maybe a tone of voice of disrespect; perhaps it bubbled over into open defiance

Proverbs 30:21-23 "Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: 22 a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food, 23 an unloved woman who is married, and a maidservant who displaces her mistress.

- D. Broken Relationship #2: Abram and Sarai

vs. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

1. Sarai unfairly blames Abram for doing the very thing she suggested
2. Perhaps she assumed that Abram was privately urging Hagar to disrespect Sarai
3. So, she attacks Abram and blames him

- E. Broken Relationship #3: Abram and His Household

vs. 6 "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

1. Abram abdicates responsibility by basically saying "That's your problem"
2. It is true that Hagar was Sarai's responsibility all along, but Abram could have defended his wife's honor
3. His slack attitude created a circumstance for Sarai to abuse Hagar
4. Sarai then harshly abuses Hagar... the very same word that was used in God's prediction about Israel in bondage to the Egyptians

Ironic!!! Before the Israelites were harshly treated in bondage by the Egyptian, one Egyptian was harshly treated in bondage by an Israelite!

F. Broken Relationship #4: Abram, Sarai, Hagar and God

vs. 6 Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her."

IV. The Restoration of Faithlessness: Hagar and the Angel of the Lord (vs. 7-14)

vs. 7-8 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

A. The Angel of the Lord

B. Fleeing in the Desert

1. It is in the desert that Christ meets us... when we are desperate with nowhere to turn
2. Not in halls of luxury or times of ease and earthly comfort
3. But in the desert of trial and suffering and flight and desperation
4. The symbolism of the well is poignant

The first mention of a well in the Bible

Another sinful woman confronted by Christ at a well many years later

John 4:10-14 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." 11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty

again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

C. The Grace of Restoration

1. It is an incredible grace from God when He interferes to cut off a sinful path before it goes too far, brings about repentance, then restores the sinner to good fellowship
2. God does that for Hagar here... the grace of restoration
3. The worst judgment God ever does is to give a sinner over to his/her sin, not interfering, but letting it go as far as it will
4. If you are drifting from God, or running from God... if you are in some pattern of sin and falling further and further away from God, perhaps this sermon is God's moment of restoration for you

D. God's Strategy of Restoration

1. Humbling her

vs. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai..."

The angel of the Lord addresses her by her proper, humbling title... not her usurped title, "Hagar, wife of Abram."

She was still "**Hagar, servant of Sarai...**"

Before healing comes humbling

James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

2. Asking her probing questions: Where have you come from? Where are you going?

This is a key question to ask spiritual fugitives. Running away from the Lord... but where have they come from, and where are they going?

What is the final destination of the road you're on? Where will it lead you??

Hagar was running away, not only from Abram and Sarai, but from the God of Abram as well. Would she return to the gods of her fathers, the detestable gods of the Egyptians?

Ra, the sun god; Osiris; Isis; Anubis, the jackal-headed god... is this where you're going, Hagar?

3. Commanding her to repent

vs. 9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."

Hagar has done damage to Sarai and to Abram by her disrespect, and by her abandoning of her position in life

The angel of the Lord commands her to go back and to submit... in effect, to repent

For another thirteen years, she would have to patiently submit herself to Sarai's authority and perform her duties as Sarai's maid

4. Encouraging her with promises, near and far

vs. 10-12 *The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." 11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."*

a) numerous descendants

Genesis 25:12-16 Ishmael would give birth to twelve sons, the tribal leaders of the Ishmaelites

b) a son

c) a marvelous name: "God hears"

d) a promise of God's ongoing concern: "The Lord has heard of your misery"

E. Aside: Who Are the Ishmaelites?

vs 12 *[Ishmael] will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."*

1. Amazing prophecies: "a wild donkey of a man"... stubborn, willful, untamed

Specifically, he would lead a roaming, unfettered, Bedouin-like existence

Job 39:5-8 *"Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? 6 I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. 7 He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver's shout. 8 He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing.*

Hagar is chafing under the yoke of her servanthood; Ishmael will roam free

2. **Striving**:

his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

3. **Surviving**: "BUT...he will live..."

4. Difficult verse:

KJV Genesis 16:12 ... he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

NASB Genesis 16:12 ... he will live to the east of all his brothers."

NIV Genesis 16:12 ... he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

ESV Genesis 16:12 ...he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."

Wenham: "He will dwell apart from his brothers" describes the Bedouin living on the fringes of a more permanent settlement... he will have a haughty, defiant attitude toward those caught up in a more conventional way of life

Genesis 25:18 His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.

Some modern Palestinians believe they can trace a claim for the land of Palestine to this one verse, stating that the angel of the Lord had promised them a land in the presence of their brothers... the translation says more "he shall dwell APART from his brothers"

5. Were the Ishmaelites Arabs?

Genesis 25:13-15 Ishmael's sons included

Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah.

Again and again, these descendents are linked with Arabia: "caravans of Tema look for water" in Job 6:19;

Isaiah 21:13-14 An oracle concerning Arabia: You caravans of Dedanites, who camp in the thickets of Arabia, 14 bring water for the thirsty; you who live in Tema, bring food for the fugitives.

Ezekiel 27:21 "'Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your customers; they did business with you in lambs, rams and goats.

Joseph sold into slavery to a bunch of Ishmaelites, a caravan heading to Egypt

Almost every time Arabia or Arab is mentioned in the OT, it is linked with the descendents of Ishmael

Modern note: the desert-dwelling Arabs were the first Muslims; and many continue to fulfill the prophecy given by the angel of the Lord

vs. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

F. Hagar's Awe-Struck Faith-filled Response

1. Naming God who spoke to her: "The God who sees me"

- You see my past history
- You see my sin
- You see my present desperate circumstances
- You see my repentance and humility
- You see my future

2. Intense awareness of God's omniscience and omnipresence

Psalm 139:1-10 O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. 2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. 3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. 5 You hem me in-- behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. 7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

V. The Lesson of Faith: God Hears, So Ask and Wait (vs. 15-16)

A. The Name "Ishmael" a Rebuke to Abram

1. Abram and Sarai should have brought their grief to the Lord in prayer... as Isaac would do one day

Genesis 25:21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

2. Abram acted independently, without prayer

Illus. George Muller in the mid-1830s cared for over 2,000 orphans in England - all by faith in God. He was known as the man who got answers to his prayers. Before he died, he had listed in his journals over 50,000 answers to prayer.

When asked how he determined the will of God on any matter, Muller listed ten steps he believed were necessary... listen to #5-8

5. I ask God in prayer to reveal his will to me.
6. I make sure I have a clear conscience before God and man.
- 7. Every time I listened to men instead of God, I made serious mistakes.**

8. I act only when I am at peace, after much prayer, waiting on God with faith.

Abram listened to his wife Sarai rather than God

Ishmael's name was a **rebuke** to him for failing to pray

B. The Name "Ishmael" ALSO an Encouragement to Abram, Sarai, and Hagar

1. Not JUST a rebuke... but also an encouragement
2. God answers prayer... simply turn your burden over to him and wait on his answer
3. Suppose Abram had done this, and been told specifically that God would open Sarai's womb in fifteen more years... they could have waited more patiently

VI. Applications

1. Learn to wait on God's plan and not take matters in your own hands
2. The ends do not justify the means... Abram redefined marriage from God's pattern in order to accomplish God's promise... that is wrong
3. Test cultural norms by God's word... God had set the pattern for marriage in Eden ("One man, one woman, one flesh union") ... just because "Everybody's doing it" doesn't make it right; polygamy was culturally accepted, but brought nothing but misery

BEWARE: our culture is redefining marriage these days, too... gay marriage is against God's will and word; polygamy will not be far behind

4. Test all advice by God's word: wives need especially to give their husbands godly advice... a wife can have an incredible influence over a husband, influencing him either TOWARD godliness, or away from it... Eve influenced her husband AWAY from godliness, as did Job's wife and Lot's wife, and Michael, David's wife... however, Sarah was the pattern of a godly wife according to 1 Peter 3
5. "God sees"... God sees everything that you do, knows where you have come from and where you are going... God's constant observation of your life is a GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT to you in trials, and a GREAT PROTECTION FROM SIN
6. "God hears" ... learn to turn all things over to God in prayer
7. Be in awe of God's specific prophecies about Ishmael, the father of the Arabs... the prophecy is still true today!!! And yet, some descendents of Ishmael will adorn the eternal temple of God in the New Jerusalem, according to Isaiah 60:7

Isaiah 60:7 All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.