

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

..... *GENESIS*



God's Kingdom Despite God's People - GEN. 20-21

Pastor Anthony Ferguson

Church family, every time that I open God's word to you, I have much hope. My hope today is big. I hope that we walk away today with a renewed commitment to read God's word. As we read God's word, I hope that a few things would happen to us: 1) I hope that God's promises would be the lens that we use to interpret our circumstances, and 2) when we fail in this, my hope is that we would have a habit of not falling into despair but rejoicing in God's grace to us despite our sins.

The truth that will motivate this change is as follows: God establishes his kingdom on earth despite Abraham, and despite us.

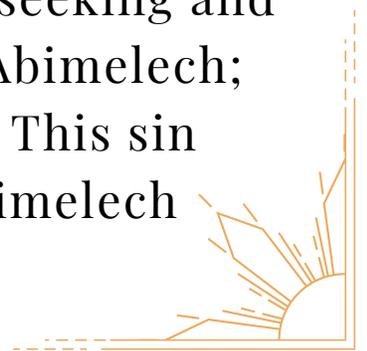
Let's investigate this amazing truth together by reading Genesis 20.

ABRAHAM'S FAITHLESSNESS HIGHLIGHTS THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD (GENESIS 20)

Abraham's Faithlessness:

In Genesis 17:1, God called Abraham to walk before him and be blameless (Genesis 17:1). In other words, God had called Abraham to be his representative in this world. As God's representative, Abraham was to reflect God to all onlookers. Moses described this same calling in Genesis 18:19 in a slightly different manner. There he described Abraham's responsibility as doing righteousness and justice. Abraham was called to treat others in truly human ways. Let's remind ourselves that God's plan in creation is to establish his kingdom on earth. He does this through a faithful covenant human partner who reflects God by being blameless and doing righteousness and justice. As God's covenant partner does this, outsiders are drawn to the Lord.

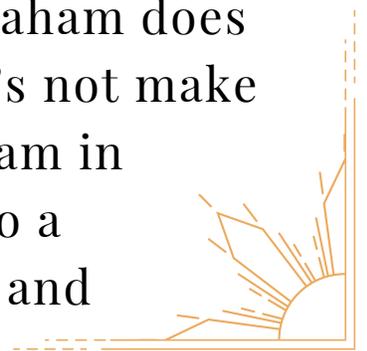
Yet, in Genesis 20, we see Abraham failing in his mission. In the verses we just read, Abraham is not doing righteousness or justice. Rather, he is self-seeking and unconcerned for the lost. Abraham lied to Abimelech; he told him that Sarah was his sister (20:2). This sin may seem small, but it was not. It led to Abimelech being cursed. In Genesis 20:3, God says,



“Behold, you are a dead man.” It also led to the potential destruction of the entire nations. Abimelech responds to the Lord in Genesis 20:4, “Will you kill an innocent people?” In Genesis 20, Abraham does not represent God well and the result is that the nations are cursed, not blessed.

Now, Abraham failed to represent God because he was afraid. It says in Genesis 20:11 that Abraham lied because he thought, “There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.” Abraham was afraid. Now, there is such a thing as a godly fear. Godly fear is when someone fears God and this fear leads to obedience, not sin. Abraham is not experiencing a godly fear here; he is experiencing ungodly fear. We know this fact because this fear leads to sin, not obedience. Let’s notice several things about ungodly fear in Genesis 20.

First, ungodly fear is the result of drawing conclusions based on circumstances, not God’s promises. Abraham looks at the people of Gerar and sees that they do not fear God (20:11). Abraham concludes that the people will kill Abraham because of Sarah and because of the people’s lack of fear of God. Notice that Abraham does not even consider God’s promises here. Let’s not make the same mistake. God had promised Abraham in Genesis 12 that he would make Abraham into a great kingdom that would bless all peoples, and

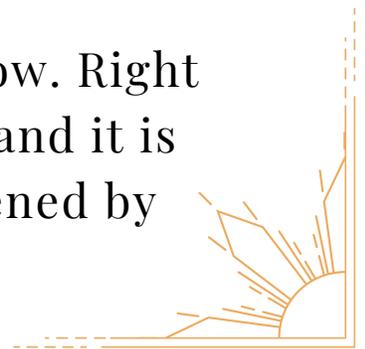


God enshrined these promises in a covenant in Genesis 15. Moreover, God promised Abraham very specifically that he would give to him and Sarah a son in Genesis 17:19, 21 and Genesis 18:9-10. In Genesis 20, Abraham is in Gerar and God has not yet given him a son from Sarah. Thus, if Abraham considered and trusted God's promises, he would know that the people of Gerar were not going to kill him. God still had much to do with Abraham.

Second, ungodly fear leads us anti-missional behavior. Notice that Abraham is afraid because he sees that there is no fear of God in Gerar (20:18). We could put it this way: Abraham forsakes fear of God because Gerar did not fear God. Do you see something horrible here? Abraham is called to influence Abimelech, but here, we see the opposite happening. In other words, Abraham's faith should lead Abimelech to have faith, but here, Abimelech's lack of faith leads Abraham to lack faith! Fear works in these anti-missional ways.

Third, ungodly fear not only manifests itself in anti-missional behavior but in all kinds of sin. For Abraham, it manifested itself in lying about his wife. Ungodly fear always manifests itself; it does not stay contained.

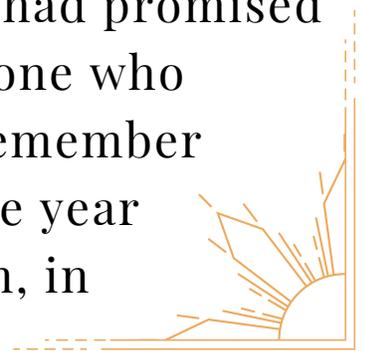
Church family, there is a lot to fear right now. Right now, there is a high degree of uncertainty, and it is possible for us to become incredibly frightened by this uncertainty. If we fix our eyes on the



problems of this world – the coronavirus daily stats and political uncertainty, we will experience immense ungodly fear. Listen, right now, there is an incredible amount of isolation; there is not a lot of fun things to do; online school is hard – children and parents are suffering; many are dying; and we do not know when or if this will end. Church family, these are gigantic problems. These problems can crush us with fear. Church family, take a minute right now, evaluate your heart. What have you feared this week?

Now, church family, the ungodly fear you experienced this week has and will work against our mission and will manifest itself in various sins. Fear often manifests itself in anger – have you blown up at family members or friends this week? Fear often manifests itself in sadness – have you withdrawn from family members or friends this week? Fear manifests itself in rejecting out mission – what non-Christian has been influencing you?

Church, Abraham needed to wear God's promises as the lens to interpret his circumstances. Abraham should not have let his circumstances interpret God's promises. For Abraham, he needed to remember that God had promised to bless those who bless him and curse the one who cursed him (Genesis 12:1-3). He needed to remember that he would have a son by Sarah within the year (Genesis 17: 19, 21 and Genesis 18:9-10). Then, in



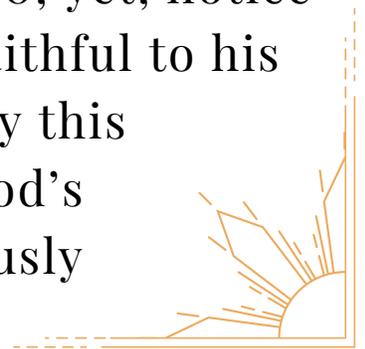
light of these promises, he should have looked at his circumstances: yes, the people of Gerar did not fear God, and yes, Sarah was very attractive even at (89 years old!). If he did this, Abraham would have confidently trusted in God amid difficult circumstances.

Church family, God's promises must be the lens we wear to interpret our circumstances. As we do this, we will be able to read news articles, see daily coronavirus stats, and live with joy amid incredibly uncertainly. Here are some of his promises especially important in this season:

- God is with us as we suffer (Psalm 23:4; Matthew 28:18-20).
- Our suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)
- Our suffering deepens our capacities for joy in God (James 5:11)

The Purpose of the Faithlessness:

Abraham has acted faithlessly in Genesis 20; yet, notice something incredibly significant! God is faithful to his promises despite Abraham. Do you see why this sermon is titled God's Kingdom Despite God's People? Oh, church family, this is a gloriously



comforting truth that leads to profound praise. I want you to be comforted today, and I want your comfort to lead to most profound praise possible. So, let's look at how God is faithful to his plan despite Abraham.

God rescues Sarah from Abimelech. God promised that his kingdom would be established through Sarah's son. Thus, God's plan depends on Sarah! Yet, now she is with Abimelech about to become his wife. Abraham's lie is, therefore, a "threat" to God's plan of establishing his kingdom through a son of Abraham and Sarah. The tension is high at this point in the story: what is going to happen? Will Abraham's lie derail God's plan? The answer is awesome: literally, awesome. God is going to rescue Sarah dramatically by cursing her enemies. He speaks to Abimelech in a dream (20:3-7) and closes the wombs of the women in Abimelech's house (20:18). The point that God is making is this: Abraham's sin does not derail God's plan. God will accomplish his purposes despite Abraham.

Now, when you put together this incredible act of God to protect Sarah next to Abraham's fearful act to lie about Sarah you see the amazing truth that God is faithful to his promises despite you and me.

Church are you lead to awe! This truth is incredible. What this means is that if you have truly trusted in Jesus and truly turned from your sins,

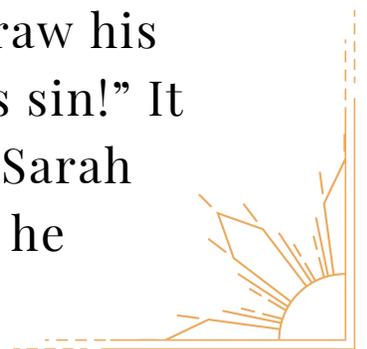


then God's promises to you are not contingent on your performance. In other words, even when you are cripple with fear because of all of the current uncertainty, God does not leave you, God does not stop working future glory for you, and God does not stop deepening your capacities for everlasting joy. God's work, ultimately, does not depend on you. Isn't that what we see here in Genesis 20?

ABRAHAM'S FAITHLESSNESS HIGHLIGHTS THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD (GENESIS 20)

Now, the theme of God's faithfulness to his plan runs throughout Scripture. So, let's briefly survey Genesis 21:1-21 and see this theme here too.

First, the birth of Isaac highlights this incredible fact. God promised Abraham that he would give him a son through Sarah in Genesis 17 and 18 despite Abraham's faithlessness with Hagar and despite his faithlessness with Abimelech. Notice, what Genesis 21:1 does not say. It does not say, "The Lord decided to withdraw his promise to visit Sarah because of Abraham's sin!" It does not say that. It says, "The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he promised" (Genesis 21:1). God's promises



depend on God not man. Notice that the Lord visited, and the Lord did. This is the Lord's doing. Notice also why God followed through on his promises to Abraham and Sarah. He followed through because this is what he said it and what he promised.

Second, God's provision for Ishmael highlights that God is faithful despite Abraham's faithlessness. The events of Genesis 21:8-21 describe Ishmael and Hagar leaving Abraham's camp and God's amazing provision for them. In these verses, we learn that God will make Ishmael into a nation "because he is the offspring of Abraham" (21:13). God had told Abraham that he would make him into a multitude of nations in Genesis 17:4, 5, and God is faithful to this promise even though Ishmael was born out of a faithless act.

CONCLUSION

Church family, Abraham used his circumstances to interpret God's promises. The result of this process was ungodly fear that manifested itself in anti-missional and sinful behavior. Let's not be like this. Oh church, in this difficult time, let's be committed to fixing our eyes on God's promises and his word to us. Let's renew our commitment, again, to reading God's word daily and praying through it. And when we fail to live



out our mission, let's rejoice that God's plan does not depend ultimately on us. This reality should motivate us to deeper obedience.

Non-Christian friend, today is the day for your salvation. You do not know what will happen tomorrow. Really, you have no guarantee that you will be alive tomorrow. Yet, you can have the guarantee that you will live forever with God because Jesus died for you. You see, you and I are broken. Our brokenness manifest itself in all kinds of sin: lying is just one of them. Christ though came into this broken world to make you and I whole again. He died on the cross for our sins, so that if any sinner would turn from their sins and trust in Jesus, Jesus would give to them his righteousness as a gift. Would you turn from your sins today and trust that Jesus died for you? If so, please reach out to us so that we can disciple you as you begin to walk with Jesus.

PRAYER

God, please let us have a renewed commitment to read your word and to pray. As we read, let us fix our eyes on your promises, and let us interpret our circumstances through your promises. We pray these things in Jesus name, amen.