

Midweek Meditation, July 15, 2020

Genesis 16

As you may remember from last week, in chapter 15, we encountered an occasion where God appears to Abram and says, "Do not be afraid, I am your shield, and your very great reward." God is affirming how Abram handled the events where he rescued Lot; with wisdom and faith. But Abram turns on a dime to an issue that has obviously been playing on his mind. He says, you know, I have been wondering about this promise you have made. How will that promise ever be fulfilled since you have given me no heir? My inheritance is going to go to a trusted servant who is not my offspring.

God patiently takes Abram outside and shows him all the stars. And he assures Abram that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars. And then, to ease Abram's concerns, God makes a covenant with Abram in such a way that Abram could understand, by using animal sacrifices as was common in Abram's day. In that covenant, God assured Abram that his offspring, not his servant would inherit the land. It would be a covenant completely dependent on God's plan, not Abram's. It would be a covenant that would unfold over time. And it would be a covenant where his people would encounter some hardship, but in God's time, the seed of Abram would inherit all that land between the Nile and the Euphrates.

As we pick up in chapter 16 we encounter Abram's wife Sarai. And she is having the same doubts about God's promise that Abram was having. From Sarai's perspective, she had somehow failed her husband, and perhaps God as well. She was past the age where she was likely to bear children, and yet Abram still had no heir to be the beneficiary of God's promise to her husband. Sarai had apparently come to the conclusion that, if God's promise was ever going to be fulfilled, God was going to need a little help. She reasoned that God's promise was all about Abram's offspring, and there was no mention of Sarai in God's promise.

So in order to give God a little help, she decided to offer her consent, for Abram would take as a wife, Sarai's Egyptian handmaid, Hagar in order that Abram would have an offspring, and thus God's promise would be fulfilled. Well, Abram agreed, and took Hagar as his wife, and she conceived a child. Well, once Hagar realizes that she is pregnant, and that now, her offspring will be the heir to God's promise, things are very different between Sarai and Hagar. Hagar is sort of lording her new position of power over Sarai and Sarai is very unhappy. Oddly enough, she says to Abram, this is your fault. Go figure. I am not sure how all of this gets to be Abram's fault, and I am not sure Abram understands that either.

But what happens next might be one of Abram's wisest moments of all time. He has sense enough to give a good safe answer that was not going to get him into any more trouble than he was already in. Abram simply says to Sarai, Do with her (Hagar) what ever you think is best. Whatever you want dear; an answer that works in any generation.

Anyway, I think that Sarai is feeling the pain of the situation that was created by her suggestion. She is feeling left out and a little envious of Hagar's new found power within this very interesting family. So she lashes out in anger toward Hagar, so that Hagar is forced to run away. As she runs, she encounters an angel of the Lord, and the Angel says to Hagar, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going." And Hagar says to the Angel, " I am running away from my mistress, Sarai." Well, at this point the angel plays the role of peace maker. I think that she reminds Hagar that she may have been a little insensitive to Sarai's vulnerable situation. The angel says, "go back and resume your place in Abram's family, and I will make your descendants too numerous to count."

The angel told Hagar, that she would bear a son, and that she should name him Ishmael. So that is the beginning of the Islamic faith, but that is not the purview of our study. We will pursue the line that proceeded from Abrams son Isaac, which of course we will hear about in coming meditations.

So Abram was 86, and Sarai presumably around that age. The last two chapters of Genesis, have not shown Abram or Sarai at their best. As we can see from the study of the last two chapters , they have both had doubts about the feasibility of God promise. So much so, that it caused them both to make mistakes and in fact have crisis of faith. This unfortunately created what was perhaps unneeded struggle and heartache for them both.

The important thing for our purpose is that, I believe that we can learn from their mistakes. Abram and Sarai both learned that they need to be patient. Abram wanted the assurance of a sacrificial covenant even though God had just told him that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars. Hopefully Abram learned a lesson about just agreeing to something that may not be the best idea, when he agreed to Sarai's scheme to help God's promise along. Sarai figured that God needed a little help if he was ever going to be true to his promise. Hopefully she learned that God's revelation does not need our help. It needs our faith.

Another mistake that they both made was that they imposed the limits of this world as they considered the feasibility of God's promise, not allowing for the miracle of God's providence. Abram and Sarai are growing in faith with each encounter that they have with God. The scripture tells us that they did learn and grow with time. The question is, will we?

How many times have we, Like Abram and Sarai, created more problems than we bargained for by being impatient when it comes to the revelation of God in our lives? How many times have we, like Sarai, devised a scheme in order to hurry God's purpose along, instead of waiting for God's plan to come into our lives?

How many times have we judged that something that is good and righteous is impossible, because we did not take into account the miracle of God's providence; not taking into account that in God, all things are possible? How many times have we created unneeded hardship and struggle just like Sarai did by her impatience, and her thinking that she had a better plan than the promise of God? How many times have others been harmed or at least inconvenienced by those occasions when we were not patient enough to wait on God's plan? How many times have we failed to acknowledge that God's plan is a journey with hills and valleys, and when we enter the valleys we panic rather than trusting that God will take care of us? Finally, how many times have we ultimately realized the abundance that comes from walking with God in spite of our worrying and doubts?

Let us Pray.