

## Midweek Meditation for the week of August 16, 2020

### Genesis 20

You may remember last week, we talked about God's judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah. And we talked about how Abraham was a man of faith, and his nephew, Lot, was a man of compromise. It was a story about how Lot chose to make his home in a community of wickedness, and how eventually, being surrounded by that wickedness, caused Lot to lose everything. He lost his wealth. He lost his wife. And, his daughters were taken into the culture of wickedness that they had learned over the years. In the end, Lot was all alone because of a life where he compromised the righteousness of God and pitched his tent in Sodom. We also talked last week about how God reassured the promise that he had made to Abraham; that he and Sarah would have a son within one year. And, God promised that Abraham's son would be the heir to God's Covenant, and that son, Isaac, and all of his descendants, would dwell in the land of Canaan.

We pick up the story of Abraham right after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The last place where we saw Abraham and Sarah was near Hebron outside their tent under the trees of Mamre. Verse 1 of our passage says that Abraham and Sarah moved from where they were, near Hebron, to the region of Negev between Kadesh and Shur. For a while, he stayed in Gerar, and the passage goes on to say that Abraham told the people in Gerar that Sarah was his sister. And then Abimelech, the King of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her into his harem, because she was beautiful. Now this should sound like a familiar story. A very similar thing happened about twenty years earlier when Abraham was Abram and Sarah was Sarai, went to Egypt under very similar circumstances. That story is found in the Chapter 12 of Genesis. Sarah was a very beautiful woman, and, as was the case back in Abraham's day, the King and all of his servants would be on the lookout for beautiful women to add to the King's harem. And if that meant killing the woman's husband, the king had the power and authority to do it. So, Abraham was afraid that Abimelech would have him killed and take his wife as a part of his harem. Now, if the King thought that Sarah was Abraham's sister, then the King would treat Abraham favorably. Fear caused Abraham to not trust in God's care. But through the years of the history of faith, Abraham is certainly not the only one whose trust in the Lord failed. Fear caused Peter to turn from God. And fear causes you and me to turn from God. Abraham is afraid, and so he lies to the king. Period. No excuses. No justification. But God made good come from the time when Abraham was afraid. God made good come from when Peter was afraid, multiple times. And, God can make good come from the times when fear forces us unto making mistakes and turn away from what we know to be right and true. When we look at this story, we can see the wheels really come off for Abraham in this story. He is afraid that Abimelech will kill him. And so, he lies about his relationship with Sarah. So, what is the difference between Abraham and Lot. Why are the consequences of Lot's misbehavior so much different than with Abraham? This may be a question that is difficult to find an answer to. My guess is that God has more patience with a lack of faith when it is caused by fear than when it is caused by a willful pursuit

of self-indulgence. Lot knew he was dwelling in a land where wickedness was all around. He made the choice that the benefits of living in a land which was more prosperous than Canaan, were worth the risk of living in a land filled with wickedness. Abraham turned from his faith because he was afraid for himself and his family. That is my best stab at interpreting the difference in these two situations. But here is something else to think about. After Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot was alone in a cave along the shore of the Dead Sea. The reason Lot left the company of Abraham in the first place was because there were too many people and too much livestock. Now he was alone. Perhaps he could have returned to the house of his uncle, and joined himself once again with the covenant that God made with Abraham, but he never returned to the house of Abraham.

Now let's talk about Abraham. Perhaps God had one of those roll your eyes moments with Abraham. "How many times do I have to reassure you?" "How many times do I have to say, Do Not be afraid?" "I told you I would take care of you." "I told you that you would be the heir to my promise, yet here we are again." But, unlike Lot in the previous Chapter, Verse 17, Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his household. Perhaps that is the key. Abraham renewed his walk with God even though he had made a mistake. Presumably, he learned from the mistake and was ready to move forward as the head of God's chosen people. What we have to look at here is that God's plans for Abraham and Sarah are sustained, not because of Abraham, but in spite of Abraham. But this passage sort of causes a little confusion in our minds. We look at the father of our faith, and he lied, and he turned away from what seemed to be what was right. In a way he put in jeopardy God's plan to bring a savior to the world. Bottom line; he failed to trust in God. He was afraid, and so he failed to trust in God. So what is the deal? Is there a double standard here? He acted out of fear and not faith. He did what he shouldn't have done. He endangered the people around him. And in the end, he gets rewarded. He receives God's blessing. What's going on here? Well, we need to look at this not in terms of Abraham's failure, but rather in terms of God's amazing grace. These kinds of mistakes happen in every human life, and in every journey of faith. We all respond with a lack of faith when we are afraid. Here is the answer to the question posed by us in this passage. Psalm 103:10. "God does not treat us as our sin deserves, or repay us according to our iniquity." And we see that amazing grace here in this passage. In a way, this passage opens a new door for you and me in our journeys with God. If the father of our faith can mess up, and God picks up the pieces, and continues to accomplish His purpose, then God can do the same thing in our lives and in our journeys. Maybe we just need to be not so quick to ask where is the justice in that? And then be better at witnessing and celebrating the amazing grace of God. Let us pray...