

Introduction

Last week we covered the first nine verses of Genesis 21, and it was about celebrating the milestones in our lives. Sarah gave birth to Isaac in Abraham's old age. He was circumcised on the 8th day as the Lord had commanded. Then, Abraham threw a big party on the day that Isaac was weaned. These were milestones in the life of Isaac and they celebrated them.

How many of you saw in the news last week a story about Joshua Salmoiraghi? His father is a disabled veteran and a pastor, and his mother is a major at the Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs. Little Joshua was diagnosed with a tumor on his left kidney in June 2017. They removed the tumor surgically and then he went through radiation and chemotherapy at the Children's Hospital of Colorado. While at the Children's Hospital, the Colorado Springs police force made him an honorary officer. After Joshua's last round of treatment, the police department came to the Children's Hospital to celebrate the occasion. There is a bell at the hospital and children that have completed their cancer treatments and are cancer free get to ring the bell. They all clapped and celebrated as Joshua rang the bell. It was a time to celebrate. But, life is not all about the celebrations in our lives. I am sure that the day he was diagnosed with cancer in June 2017, their family was shedding some tears. I know that we shed tears in April 2000 when my daughter was diagnosed with leukemia.

There are mountain top experiences and there are some valleys that we have to walk through. There are some things that we celebrate and there are some things that we have to work through. Last week we covered celebrating the milestones. This week we are covering the rest of Genesis 21, which is about working through the conflicts in our lives. We need to be able to work through the conflicts as much as we celebrate the milestones. In our text today there are a couple of different conflicts. The first conflict is between Saria and Ishmael. The second conflict is between Abraham and Abimelech. There are two conflicts, and two different ways of dealing with those conflicts. In the first conflict, the parties separated. In the second conflict, the two discussed their issues, made a covenant, and continued living in the same area.

Dealing With The Conflicts In Our Lives

1. Sarah's Conflict With Ishmael
 2. Abraham's Conflicts With Abimelech
1. **Sarah's Conflict With Ishmael** (Gen 21:9-21)

(Gen 21:9-21) "Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. {10} Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." {11} The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. {12} But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. {13} And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." {14} So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. {15} When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes. {16} Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept.

{17} God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. {18} "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." {19} Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. {20} God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. {21} He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt."

In Genesis 16, Hagar bore Abram a son named Ishmael. Abraham was eighty-six when Ishmael was born. Sarah has just given birth to Isaac and Abraham is not one hundred years of age, which makes Ishmael fourteen years old. He is referred to as a lad, but he is a young man, not a little boy. I cannot speak for anyone else, but I was a foolish young man at that age. I made faces at my sister and mocked her, and I received lots of spankings for it. I knew which buttons to push with my little sister, and I pushed them regularly. I identify with Ishmael and I think he knew which buttons to push with Sarah.

(Gen 16:15-16) "So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. {16} Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him."

In Genesis 16, I want to bring out two other things that are noteworthy. First, when Hagar conceived Ishmael, Sarah became despised in her sight. There was obviously some friction and ill feelings between the two ladies. Sarah began to treat Hagar harshly and so she fled from her presence. Conflicts often cause us to leave. I identify with Hagar in that I don't enjoy being around conflict. I don't enjoy being treated harshly or without respect. I would rather leave and go somewhere that I am going to be treated properly and with respect.

(Gen 16:5-6) "And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me." {6} But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence."

However, an angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar in the wilderness and confronted her about leaving. The angel said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" Then, the angel told her to return to Sarai and submit to her authority. Running away is not always the answer. God wants us to be submitted to our authorities. Hagar returned to Sarai, but that does not mean that all the animosity and ill feelings between the two were resolved. I believe there were underlying or root issues that were not resolved.

(Gen 16:8-9) "He said, 'Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?' And she said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.' {9} Then the angel of the LORD said to her, 'Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority.'"

I managed a golf club in Orlando for a number of years. The owner of the club was not an easy man to work for. In fact, he did not treat me or anyone else very well. His son was even more of a problem. It was a difficult seven years of my life. I was also serving as one of the associate

pastors at a church. The other elders strongly encouraged me to remain on in the position I was in. so, I also identify with Hagar in being told to stay submitted to a person that treats you harshly.

The second significant thing in Genesis 16 that is applicable to our text today is the other message that the angel of the Lord gave to Hagar. The angel told her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count. The angel told her to name the child Ishmael, and then gave some details about Ishmael. He would be a wild donkey of a man and his hand would be against everyone, and everyone's hand would be against him, and he would also live east of his brothers.

(Gen 16:10-12) "Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, 'I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count.' {11} The angel of the LORD said to her further, 'Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. {12} He will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers.'"

Now, as we return to Genesis 21, Ishmael is mocking Sarah. His hand is against Sarah, and Sarah's hand is against him, just as the angel of the Lord had prophesied. Ishmael was a wild donkey of a man, meaning that he was not going to be controlled or tamed. Ishmael was not going to be one that Abraham sat down with, rebuked, and the matter would be resolved. He was a wild donkey that was going to do whatever he pleased, and was unrestrained. This made for a very difficult working solution for Abraham. It lent itself to the last thing the angel of the Lord had told Hagar, "he will live to the east of his brothers." Because Ishmael would not be able to get along with others, he was going to have to leave his father's house and live to the east. God knew all of this fourteen years earlier.

Ishmael's lack of honor and respect for Sarah upset her. She went to Abraham and told him to drive out the maid and her son. In verse eleven, we see that the matter distressed Abraham. In verse twelve, God told Abraham not to be distressed. The Hebrew word that is translated as distressed is ra'a' (Strong's H3415), which means to be broken up with any violent action, to be grievous, displeased, or distressed. Abraham was broken up inside over this conflict. Conflicts tear people up. They cause great stress, and grieving. People lose sleep. Their get emotionally worn out. Abraham and Sarah were great distressed by this conflict.

Before moving on I want to make mention of Abraham's love for Ishmael. He was distressed and broken up because he loved his son. God comforts Abraham and tells him not to be distressed, but to listen to Sarah. He tells him that his descendants will be through Isaac. Even though his descendants would be through Isaac, Abraham loved Ishmael. Even though Ishmael was difficult to get along with and provoked Sarah, Abraham loved Ishmael. I believe that this is a picture of the Father's love. In John 3:16, we read that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son. In 1 John 2:2 we read that God made provision for our sins and also the sins of those of the whole world. Even though not all will accept Jesus and enter the kingdom of God, God loves them. Even though we may act foolishly at times, God still loves us. Nothing can separate us from God's perfect love. In Ishmael's case, the lineage of Christ was going to come through Isaac; nothing was going to change that. In our case, whosoever will believe in Christ will not perish, but will have everlasting life. Our salvation is possible because of God's love.

(1 John 2:2) “and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

(John 3:16) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

I believe that Abraham called upon the Lord. In his trouble, he cried out to God. When we are torn up inside over things, that is the first thing we should do. In Psalm 34:6-7, we read that *“This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him And saved him out of all his troubles. {7} The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them.”* That is what Abraham did, he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord answered him. Our text says that God comforted Abraham by telling him not to be distressed.

In 1 Samuel, Elkanah had two wives, Peninah and Hannah. Peninah had children and Hannah had none, and Peninah would provoke her bitterly to irritate her. Hannah, like Abraham, was greatly distressed and torn up inside. What did she do? She prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. When Eli saw her praying to the Lord, he thought she was drunk. She told him that she was not drunk, but was a woman oppressed in spirit, and that she had been pouring out her soul before the Lord. I believe that Abraham, like Hanna, was torn up inside and called upon the Lord. I believe that God spoke to Abraham after he had cried out to Him.

(1 Sam 1:6-15) “Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. {7} It happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat....{10} She, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly....{12} Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. {13} As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. {14} Then Eli said to her, “How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you.” {15} But Hannah replied, “No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the LORD.”

God also comforted Abraham by telling him that He would make a nation of Ishmael, because he was a descendant of Abraham. So, Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and sent Hagar and Ishmael away. The end result of this conflict was a separation. Some differences are reconcilable, and some things are not reconcilable. When Karen and I moved here over thirteen years ago, we were looking for a church to join. One of the churches was very reformed; they were five point Calvinists. As I met with the pastor, he was very clear to me that if I was not a five-point Calvinist, I would not be permitted to do any ministry, not even teach a Sunday school class. For me, I do not teach the doctrines of men, but the Word of God. I will not change the Word of God to fit a man-made doctrine called limited atonement. I believe that when God says that Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world,” that He means exactly that. Jesus paid the price for the sins of the whole world, not just for the elect. The word world is different than the word elect. Paul wrote to the Galatians if anyone preaches a different gospel, let him be accursed. I am not going to twist God’s word to fit a man-made doctrine, and I am not going to preach a different gospel. This was an irreconcilable difference, and we knew that we could not be a part of that church. They had lots of good people at that church, but it was not one that we could stay at.

There were two different nations in Abraham's house. There were two different kingdoms. Jesus said that a kingdom divided against itself is laid waste and a house divided against itself falls. Abraham had two kingdoms rising up and was divided. Abraham's house was divided against itself. Sarah was upset. Abraham was torn apart. Hagar was only there because God made her go back and submit to her mistress. There was no peace in this household, and the only solution here was to send Hagar and Ishmael away. The separation was difficult for Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael, but it brought peace to the household.

(Luke 11:17) "But He knew their thoughts and said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house divided against itself falls."

On a side note, Hagar was a bond slave and both Hagar and Ishmael belonged to Sarah. She sent them away, giving them freedom. Hagar was considered a concubine, which meant that she did not have a claim to any inheritance or wealth from Abraham. She did not get his inheritance, but she got her freedom.

Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. After the water in the skin was used up, and that was probably about five or six gallons of water she told God not to let the boy see her die. Ishmael is fourteen years old, not a little boy. Hagar lifted up her voice and wept. Notice that it was not Hagar's voice that God responded to. In verse seventeen, it says that God heard the lad crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven. Children and youth, we have a time of prayer every service. Do not think that your prayers do not matter. Both Hagar and Ishmael were crying out, but God was listening to Ishmael's prayer. Your prayers matter to God, maybe even more than the prayers of the adults. Let me encourage you to call upon God and cry out to Him in our prayer times. You will see results from your prayers. God told Hagar that He would make a great nation of Ishmael and not to fear. God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She filled the skin and gave Ishmael a drink. We quickly go from a fourteen year old getting a drink of water in the wilderness to becoming an archer, living in the wilderness, and getting married to an Egyptian woman.

2. Abraham's Conflicts With Abimelech

(Gen 21:22-34) "Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do; {23} now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned." {24} Abraham said, "I swear it." {25} But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. {26} And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor did I hear of it until today." {27} Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. {28} Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. {29} Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?" {30} He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well." {31} Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath. {32} So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. {33} Abraham

planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. {34} And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.”

The second conflict is between Abraham and Abimelech. There are two issues here that need to be worked through. One of the issues is based on a fear, and the other is based on an incident that has occurred. Things happen in life and issues develop. We do not know what caused Abimelech to be fearful that Abraham would not treat his posterity with kindness, but I appreciate the fact that he went to Abraham and spoke to him about it. Many people get suspicious and then interpret everything that happens like the other person is purposely doing something, when all along it was just a thought, fear, or suspicion that they had. It is good to go and communicate and get things out in the open. So, I appreciate Abimelech’s initiative to work this out.

Abimelech wants to make sure that his descendants are well taken care of. It is good to think of our children’s future. I saw a bumper sticker one time on the back of a nice motorhome that said, “I am spending my children’s inheritance.” That was not Abimelech. He wanted to secure his children’s inheritance and well-being. One of the verses that has spoken to me about my children’s inheritance is Proverbs 20:7. *“A righteous man who walks in his integrity, how blessed are his sons after him.”* By choosing to walk in integrity, I am blessing my children.

The second conflict is about a well. Abraham had dug a well and Abimelech’s herdsmen had seized. Water is a precious commodity in the desert lands, so this was not a small matter. This particular well did not have particularly good water. I say that because after they made a covenant, Abraham planted a tamarisk tree. Tamarisk trees do well in salty water. They absorb the salt and then give off a salty oil, which gets washed off when it rains. That salt makes the soil around the tree too salty for any other vegetation to grow. The tamarisk tree also has a long tap root and will use up a lot of the source water. In the southwestern United States, the Forestry Department has bred a tamarisk beetle that only attacks tamarisk trees, and they have tried to control the population of these trees with a natural method. So, the water in that well was probably very salty and not of high quality.

The first place that I lived in Iran was a place called Agha Jari, which means Mr. Jari in Farsi. It had terrible drinking water. We boiled our water, and then filtered it, and it was still very salty. You got used to it, but when you would go on vacation and come back, the first couple of days the water tasted horrible. I remember looking forward to our vacations and landing in England and drinking water because it tasted so good compared to what we had in Agha Jari. I imagine the well water that this conflict was over was very similar. This conflict was over a real issue, a well that belonged to Abraham had been seized by Abimelech’s herdsmen. The well may not have been the best quality, but it was still needed.

Our text says that Abraham complained to Abimelech. The King James says that Abraham reproved Abimelech. I believe this is a more accurate translation. The Hebrew word is yakaw (Strong’s H3198), and it means to reprove, correct, judge, or rebuke. Several things stand out over this conflict.

First, Abimelech knew nothing about the problem. Abimelech was a righteous man and walked in integrity. We saw his integrity before God when he took Sarah to be his wife because Abraham had not been truthful with him and had told him that she was his sister. I believe that

Abimelech would have restored the well to Abraham and corrected the problem if he had known about it.

Second, Abraham should have gone to Abimelech when the incident first occurred. Jesus said in Matthew 18:15 that *“if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private...”* Abraham should have gone to Abimelech, but he had not done that. Sometimes everyone else knows about the problem because we have told everyone, but we have not gone to the one person that we should have gone to and worked it out. We should not sweep things under the carpet and think that the problem will go away. We have a responsibility to go to the person and iron things out.

When we go to our brother, there are several principles to abide by. First, Jesus said to go to our brother in private. We need to keep our conflicts only between the parties involved. Everyone else likes to know the latest gossip, but the Scriptures tell us to keep it between us and the other party. It should be private. Second, Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1 that we should go in a spirit of gentleness. Gentleness keeps a conflict from escalating, but a harsh word, tone, or attitude stirs up anger. Third, we should go with a spirit of humility and fear, knowing that we could easily fall prey to the same sin. Fourth, Paul wrote that we are to be spiritual. We need to be right with God. We need to have searched our own hearts, and taken the log out of our own eyes before going to our brother. Fifth, we are to go with the right goal or objective. When we go to a brother, we are there to restore them. The purpose is not to judge them or put them down; our goal is to restore them.

(Gal 6:1) “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”

(Pro 15:1) “A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”

How did Abraham do? Well, he did bring up the issue with Abimelech, even though Phicol was there. Abraham gave Abimelech oxen and lambs as a gift. Abraham then set aside seven lambs for Abimelech. Abraham’s goal was not to tear apart or put down Abimelech. His goal was to restore the relationship. Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant that day and took oaths. Their relationship was stronger after the event than before the incident.

Many years ago I heard a message about mending nets. Fishermen were always mending their nets. In the places where tears had taken place, they wove in new strands, and the end result was that the mended places were stronger than the other places of the net. When Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech, their relationship went to a deeper level than it was before. A covenant is the strongest tie that you can make with someone. A covenant was a vow to death if you violate the terms of the covenant. In a covenant, we swear to defend one another. In a covenant, your friends are my friends and vice-versus. In a covenant, we go to battle for one another. In a covenant, we become as one. Abraham and Abimelech had a rift between them, but that has been dealt with and they have become as one. The only way to become one is to forgive one another. We cannot be holding grudges and be one with someone. Abraham and Abimelech forgave one another and made a covenant with one another.

In a covenant, there are witnesses. First, God is a witness in a covenant. We exchange our vows before one another and before God. We saw in Jeremiah 34:8-20 that God held Israel

accountable for the covenant that they had made before him. We also saw in Malachi 2:13-16 that God held Israel accountable for violating their covenants with their wives. God is a witness of the covenants that we make. Second, there are usually other people that are witnesses in a covenant. Phicol was a witness to the covenant that Abraham made with Abimelech. Third, in our text, Abraham said the seven lambs were a witness that he had dug the well and it belonged to him. He named the well Beersheba, which means well of seven. Those seven lambs would be a continual reminder of the covenant that had been made. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, it is a continual reminder of the covenant that God made with us through the Lamb that He sacrificed for us.

Our text today ends with two significant things. First, Abraham called upon the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. When we resolve conflicts with one another, it pleases God. Our worship with God is restored. Jesus said that if we are presenting our offerings at the altar and remember that our brother has something against us, leave our offering and first be reconciled to our brother. Then, after we have been reconciled, we should present our offering. Abraham has been reconciled to his brother, and he now presents his offerings to God.

(Matt 5:23-24) "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

I have heard a number of people say that they are good with God, but it is people that they have a hard time with. To be good with God, you have to be good with God's people, your brothers and sisters. It is a lie of the enemy to think that you can have this great relationship with God without being in right relationship with your brother. And, when we get these relationships right, it frees us up to worship the Lord, which is what Abraham did.

The last thing that happened is the result of how Abraham and Abimelech worked through the issues. It says that Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days. The end result was they lived at peace with one another. They did not separate and go their own ways.

(Gen 21:34) "And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days."

Conclusion

How are you handling the conflicts in your lives? Are you torn up inside like Abraham was when Sarah asked him to send away Ishmael? Are you torn up inside because someone has seized your well or something else that belongs to you? Have you sought the Lord about what to do? Abraham sought the Lord and He comforted him and delivered him from his troubles.

Do you go to your brother when he offends you, or do you sweep it under the rug? God wants us to be a people who go to our brother and resolve things. We are the Connection Church because God wants us to be properly connected with Him and with one another. The only way to be properly connected is to learn to work things out with our brother. If we don't resolve things, those little splinters in our flesh get infected. Those offenses turn to roots of bitterness. In Hebrews we are told to "see to it that no root of bitterness springs up, causing many to be

defiled.” God wants all of us to see to it that no roots of bitterness spring up. He wants us to learn to work things out with our brothers.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:7 that it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come. We have to learn to deal with these issues that come up in our lives and relationships so that we can be in right relationship with one another and with God.

This morning, as we come to a close, ask yourself, “Is there someone that I am holding something against? Is there someone that I need to go and work things out with?” If so, let me encourage you to determine in your heart to go. Spend time getting your heart right before God. Get your attitude and your motives right. Go humbly and restore your brother.

Let’s pray.

Introduction

1. **Sarah's Conflict With Ishmael** (Gen 21:9-21, Gen 16:5-12, 15-16, John 3:16, 1 John 2:2, Psa 34:6-7, 1 Samuel 1:6-15, Luke 11:17)

2. **Abraham's Conflicts With Abimelech** (Gen 21:22-34, Pro 20:7, Matt 18:15, Gal 6:1, Pr 15:1, Jer 34:8-20, Mal 2:13-16, Matt 5:23-24)

My Application today: