

Good evening, we're continuing our series through Genesis and tonight we come to this pretty *strange* passage about Abram, Sarah and Hagar.

Now I guess that as David was reading this passage, some of you were thinking
*Well what's **this** all about?*
*What can we possibly **learn** from this!*
Because this is a pretty messy story!

Sarah is miserable. She wants a child, God has promised her one,
but none has come along
so she gives her servant Hagar to Abraham
so that **he** can have sex with her,
so that **she** can then adopt her child –
So what's that about? and 'under whose heaven' is this *ever* going to be a good idea?!

Unbelievably, Abraham goes along with it,
gets Hagar pregnant and then wonders why "all hell breaks loose in his family! – Well go figure!!

and then Hagar, in a spectacularly career limiting move, starts to despise Sarah because SHE has the child and Sarah doesn't –
which makes Sarah so mad that she abuses Hagar so that that Hagar has to run away.

And we're supposed to learn something of God in all of this???

This story is full of brokenness and misery.
It makes Eastenders seem like an Episode of Teletubbies.
But this is real life in the raw
Stupid people, making stupid decisions!

And if you're having problems thinking –
what has this got to do with me?
well you need to know that
- the Bible is not a book full of impossibly 'bright and shiny people' that we are supposed to copy

The Bible is full of real people, with real mess, and real brokenness
into which God steps to redeem.
The Bible is full of stories **of God** taking people
"where they are at" and working salvation into their lives.

It is a record of God's grace:
to people who don't deserve it,
who don't even want it, and
who repeatedly (again and again) screw up in "a right royal fashion!"

Which is good because it teaches us two things:
Firstly. That the Bible has something to say to all of us.
Because all of us mess up morally and
are about as spiritually thick as two short planks! and

Secondly, there is hope.
Because **if Abraham**, who has about as much spiritual backbone as a jellied slug can be a hero for God, then so can we.
If he can be called a friend of God, then so can we.
If he can be redeemed, then so can we!

So this is a real-life with 3 players:
There is a barren woman called Sarah,
A stupid man called Abraham, and
an oppressed slave called Hagar.

And between them they make a complete dogs dinner of their life,
but each of them: Sarah, Abraham and Hagar
have something to teach us.

Lets begin with

1. Sarah.

v1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.

Now in those 9 simple words there is a whole world of pain!

Psychologically, back in Sarah's time,
the most important role for a woman was to have a family.
This would have been Sarah's greatest ambition.

She would have been desperate for children.
This was her role, her purpose, her duty in life:
to have children, to build a family. Period. That's it

Children would give Sarah her sense of significance,
they would give her social standing,
they would give her purpose; and
If she didn't have them
then it would almost unbearable
- *stupid people would have said 'why hasn't God blessed her?'*
- *she would have known that was stupid but it didn't make it any easier!*
she would have felt worthless.

For her, 'children' were what life was all about
And the fact that she had none
would have been psychologically devastating,
She was in a world of pain because
Children, in her time, were a woman's capital, significance and purpose.

But to make matters worse

Theologically God has already promised Abraham children.

*I am going to save the world through you
Do you see all this death and suffering and need?
well I am going to save the world through your family.
I'm going to give (you & Sarah) a son,
and from him will come the Messiah who will save the world.*

So Sarah would have been both
doubly excited that **her offspring** would be this Messiah, and
doubly devastated that she felt she was letting everybody down!
So she is in a pretty bad place, with a terrific amount of pain.

And she proposes something that makes for her, a bad situation even worse
She says to Abram

*v2 Go, sleep with my maidservant;
perhaps I can build a family through her.*

Now I am going to talk more about that in a moment.
But I want you to see that when Hagar became pregnant
v4 Hagar began to despise her mistress.

Hagar begins to look down on Sarah
Hagar begins to think
Right, well I *was* the slave,
but now I am bearing the Master's child I am superior to you,
I am more favoured than you,
I am more blessed than you
And, for Sarah, her solution was worse than the original problem!

Both women (Sarah and Hagar) saw children as their ultimate capital.
Their significance, their sense of 'who they are' was bound up in 'family'.
And now that Hagar has a child – she feels superior to Sarah!
And Sarah's solution becomes her curse!

And here is the truth that I want us to think about right now:

Whenever we make something our ultimate,
that is not God,
whenever we make something: the thing that we get our sense of value from,
that is not God
we are heading straight for heart-ache city.
This is really important!

Every culture has a “unless you have this you are a nobody” idea.
If I asked us what that is in our culture
I wonder what we would say?

Unless we have popularity (unless we're in with the in-crowd – we're a nobody) –
*I have watched enough teenage girl movies to know that this is a recurring theme – now there's an admission I
wouldn't want repeated outside of church!?*
But Popularity is in our society “an ultimate”
Body shape/looks – they are social capital
Money, Career, Possessions – they give us a sense of significance and purpose.

Every culture has an “unless you have this you are a nobody” idea.
it could be a boyfriend, girlfriend, or a husband, wife?

David said something really telling this morning.
He said: whatever gets us excited, arouses our interest, gives us energy – that's where we'll find our ultimate
Whatever we dream about, or pursue that's where our treasure is.

And just because we live in a different culture to Sarah doesn't mean that our society doesn't attempt to define **for us**
what makes us valuable!

There **IS** a **something** in our life that we must have, to be “a **someone**”

And here is the problem...
anything that we place our faith in that is NOT God –
will let us down.

Nothing that we value, other than God, can stand the test of time,

nothing that we can love can survive when it comes into contact with the harsh realities of life; and nothing will satisfy the “eternal in us” except God **everything** we place our faith in, that is not God, will elude us, or fade away or get spoilt or die.

Sarah pins all her hopes on a child
she begins v1 feeling vulnerable, defenceless, isolated and insecure.
and by v4 she is eaten with jealousy *and even more* vulnerable, isolated and insecure
Why? Because she made something, other than God, her sense of value.
This is her story – and she is in a raw and broken place.

Abraham doesn't help

2. Abraham makes some really stupid decisions

For when Sarah came to him and said

*“I know, I have this really great idea,
why don't you sleep with Hagar and then I can adopt her child!”*

Abraham, somehow, thinks “this is a good idea!”.

I'm not sure Abraham would recognise a good idea, if it came up to him, shook him by the hand and said “hello, I'm a really good idea!”.

*v3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years,
Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and
gave her to her husband to be his wife.*

v4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

I want you to notice that Sarah and Abram are treating Hagar as a piece of property, like a slave.
And this would not have been quite common among the people's that they lived with
But just because the world treats people in a particular way –
doesn't mean to say that Sarah and Abraham should.

Abraham is about to take more than one wife.

And again Polygamy would not have been quite common among the Canaanites.

But just because the world is doing it,
doesn't mean that Abraham and Sarah should.

Polygamy is never condoned in the Bible.

Indeed every time it happens - ruin and disaster always follows.

There is loads of stuff in the Bible that people do – but that doesn't mean to say God approves (people seek vengeance, people lie, people plot and gossip) but that doesn't mean to say God approves ... the Bible just tells us how it is.

But here is the punch-line

If we choose to do something that compromises God's ideal for us
it will always come back and bite us in the back-side
we reap what we sow.

If we compromise on God's plan

it will lead to down-stream misery and
take us away from God's will in our life.

God doesn't just say stuff just for the fun of it – or to spoil our fun
He knows what he's doing, and he wants us to flourish!

By the end of v2 Abraham agrees with Sarah and he takes Hagar as his second wife.
And the consequences are strife in Abram's family,

And conflict between the Arabs & Israeli for 1,000s of years to come,
which is still going on today...

All the way through the Bible people do what **they think** is best and disaster follows.
Eve offers Adam an apple and Adam thinks "sure why not!"
Delilah offers Samson a soft breast and Samson thinks "sure why not!"
Sarah offers Abraham a second wife

And Abraham has a choice. At this point he has a choice....

Do I trust the promises of God; or
Do I do what I think is best?

Do I trust God who doesn't seem to be delivering the way I think he should; or
Do I take things into my own hands and compromise on what is right?

Will I listen to the voice of God; or
Will I listen to the world, my friends and my own wants?

Everyday, you and I are faced with such choices
Will I trust God's promises for me (even though it all seems a bit tough)
or
will I choose to go my own way?

Everyday we are faced with 'cross-roads'
will I take God's path; or my own?

And listen, the only way we will ever prove God's power in our life
is if we trust him when things aren't easy!
the only way we will develop life-changing faith is when we choose to follow him when the world, our friends and our
own inclinations
tell us to do it our way.

Only then will we discover that **his ways work** and they lead to life and ultimate blessing;

Will we get romantically involved with someone who doesn't love God?
Will we have sex outside of the protection and security and commitment of marriage?
Will we do something that the world thinks "is perfectly all right" or
will we prove God's promises in our life.

Abraham has been waiting for ages for this child
Sarah is probably past the point of child bearing age
And the promises of God seem to mock them both

BUT God **CAN** be trusted
His ways are for our ultimate flourishing
As we rely upon him –
one thing is absolutely sure -
God delivers on his promise.

Jesus said "I have come to give you life and life to the full".
He doesn't lie
his path will lead to life in all its fullness.
So will you trust him and prove your faith?

Abraham and Sarah take matters into their own hands, they operate like the world, and everything goes belly up

3. And thirdly, it is Hagar who bears the brunt of it.

v4 When Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to despise Sarah

Then Sarai says 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."

And Abraham says

v6 Your servant is in your hands

Do with her whatever you think is best."

So Sarah mistreated Hagar; and Hagar fled from her.

Now this is all pretty shameful

What's going on here is that

Hagar makes a power-play to usurp Sarah's position

Because Hagar knows she is the one with all the cards,

she is the one with the child,

she sees an opportunity and she goes for it

Sarah realises her mistake

She realises she is now even more insecure than ever

And so she blames Abraham !!

(there has to be some logic in there somewhere but I've given up trying to find it)

And Abraham, shamefully, caves in –

rather than protecting Hagar

rather than saying “whoa this was your idea...

he makes matters even worse

by delivering Hagar into Sarah's hands; and

Sarah is so jealous that she abuses Hagar

to the point where (heavily pregnant) she runs away into the desert!

It is all pretty hopeless.

And into this situation God steps...

v7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert;

v8 And he said,

"Hagar, servant of Sarah, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

Who is this Angel of the Lord?

At first Hagar has no idea

But what WE know is that when “the angel of the Lord appears to Moses as a burning bush”.

Moses says, I have seen the Lord.

When “the angel of the Lord” wrestles Jacob as a stranger.

Jacob says: I have seen the Lord

When “the angel of the Lord” appears to Joshua as a military general. Joshua says “I have seen the Lord”.

This angel is God and he appears as a “burning bush”, a soldier, a stranger,

and, it is only *afterwards* that they figure they have just encountered God.

God doesn't just have one way of appearing to us!

God *could speak* to you through a bush, a soldier, a stranger – but he could also speak through a book or a picture or a friend or even a Vicar!

He could speak to you in quietness, or in high emotion, or in the force of an argument - You don't know!

God comes to us in all sorts of different ways

Do not value one way over another – or you may miss him!

If Joshua only valued burning bushes he would have missed God's call

If Moses only wanted a Military General to give advice on how to rescue Israel from Egypt he would have missed God's call

The Angel is God's voice to Hagar

So What does he say?

He says the same thing he says to all people who realise they are making a complete mess of their lives...

He says "*where have you come from and where are you going*"

"where have you come from and where are you going"

It is the most important question in the world

What are you doing and where are you going with your life?

That's what he is asking you tonight

What are you doing and where are you going with your life?

do you want to be free from your culture which tells you lies about what makes you important?

do you want to be free from past mistakes and bad habits?

Well the only way we will **ever** be free is

if we realise that our standing, our value, our purpose

is found in the grace of God who sees us and longs to redeem us.

It is when Christ is our life, and not our family,

It is when Christ is our life, and not our career,

It is when Christ is our life, and not what we **think we need**,

That we will discover "who we are and where we are going".

It is when God is our capital

that we discover our true riches, how precious, how valuable we truly are

Once Hagar knew this

then God sent her back.

He sent her back with a promise of blessing – but see this...

he sent her back!

God said I have heard your misery.

I understand where you're at

I understand the brokenness you are in,

now go back

I will not take you out of the situation you are in

But I will be with you **IN** the situation you are in.

v9Then the angel of the LORD told her,

"Go back to your mistress and submit to her."

"I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

v11 I have heard of your misery.

v12 and your child 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."

I want you to see something

It isn't suddenly all happy families for Hagar.

She encounters God and

God sends her back into the situation she has come out of.

Just because God steps into our lives to redeem them

doesn't mean to say that everything is magically going to be alright from now on.

If we sin – we WILL be forgiven –

but that doesn't mean to say that we escape the consequences of our choices.

If I have an affair or fiddle my expenses or physically abuse my wife –

I am sure, if I was repentant, that God would forgive me –

but that doesn't mean to say that I would still keep my job, or my home or the respect of my friends.

My choices have consequences even though I am God's child

This is why we must choose God's path for us.

For we CAN make numerous dumb choices

but every decision has consequences,

Just because God steps in to forgive

doesn't mean to say we don't have to face the music.

But, here is the hope,

we CAN do it with God alongside

and just because we screw up God's Plan A for our lives –

just because other people screw up God's plan A for our lives,

(and believe me they can)

doesn't mean to say that the infinitely creative God

cannot create a plan B, C, D, E and F if he has to...

I must be on plan Z1000, given all the times I've screwed up !

God doesn't just have one plan for you AND if you screw it up –

its game over

He is an infinitely creative God, that is involved in our life,

who can make life out of death and beauty out of chaos and give meaning and hope where there is none!

That's what this passage is all about...

So as we come to the end of this service

Can you hear the voice of God???

Is there anywhere in your life that you are compromising in?

Wise-up ☺

it'll not deliver the blessing that you are looking for

God can be trusted – Put it right.

Is there a situation that you are in that causes you hurt and misery?

You are not alone
God sees you! God sees you!!!
He knows your struggle
He is not idle – he is the God who saves
And he will never leave you or forsake
He STILL has plans for you
plans for your blessing and not your harm
so seek his face and listen for his voice and follow his path.