

**Pray**

*I saw Gene Skyberg on Friday.*

In the midst of all of life's heartaches, the deceptions, discouragements, our own failings... how are we going to learn about God?

How do we know that God is trustworthy, that He knows what He's doing, that we are in His care?

Life never goes as planned... not for long. It is full of unpleasant surprises, horrible tragedies, long periods of suffering.

There is blessing and beauty... but often it seems overshadowed by the hardship.

How are we to learn about a God who makes and keeps promises of blessing in our future?

We cannot see Him. We cannot see the blessings.

This text that we are going to look at together was originally written to a people in the wilderness.

They had been in slavery for some 400 years... now they were wanderers in the desert... no livelihood, no land...

All who were alive had only known oppression and slavery. They had been born into it.

Their lives were full of discouragement, tragedy, and unpleasant surprises. This was still the case in the wilderness.

And, they knew almost nothing about the God who had made promises to them.

Can you live on promises? Can you eat promises? Can you take a promise to the bank... if there was a bank?

How were they to learn about a God who makes and keeps promises of blessing in their future?

We (they and us) learn about this God and what it means to live with His promises by seeing how He worked in the lives of others.

This morning we are going to see what God and His promise meant to two very different women.

**What is it like to believe in God who makes promises?**

This is the great story of God working in and with His people... a story that begins in a garden, perfect, full of blessing.

Right away in the garden God's people, Adam and Eve, disobey Him and invite God's curse and death into the world.

Then their son, the first human being born into this world murders his brother.

This sort of sin spreads to the whole earth and God decides to destroy people in a flood, all except for one man and his family.

Noah survives the flood because God showed him His grace.

Even then, sin is not eradicated and it spreads once again throughout the whole earth.

But, God has a plan to deal with sin and bring blessing to His people throughout His entire creation.

This plan begins with a promise to one man, Abram, who is commanded to move from his home and his people.

It is a promise of descendants. (A promise to Israel that has been already fulfilled in part. They are a nation now.)

It is a promise of land. (Also a promise to Israel... but one they are having a difficult time believing.)

It is a promise of blessing so that Abram and his descendants will be a blessing to the whole earth.

Abram is learning that when God makes a promise, He does whatever it takes to keep that promise.

When Abram's wife was taken from him in Egypt, God got her back with interest.

Even though Abram was not yet in possession of the promised land, God took him on a tour of it anyway.

When Abram went to war to rescue his nephew, God gave him victory and blessed him even then.

When Abram doubted that God could give Him a son, God swore a blood oath by Himself to Abram.

Abram is learning what life is like living with a God who makes and keeps His promises.

Such living demands faith... because we have to hope for what we cannot see with assurance from a God we cannot see.

Abram, by the time we get to Genesis 16, is 85 years old. He still has no son.

But, this chapter is not about Abram's struggle as He learns to trust in the God who makes and keeps promises.

It is about the struggle of two women in Abram's house. They need to learn too.

**What is it like to believe in God who makes promises?**

**I. When we take matters into our own hands. Gen. 16:1-6**

The first of these two women is Sarai, Abram's wife.

She understands the promise well enough... and she understands the problems. Abram is 85. Worse yet, She is 75.

You don't need a degree in biology to figure this out. Sarai knows that she is not going to have any children.

First, she never has... and now she's simply too old. No one has children at her age.

And, she knows why (vs. 2), "The Lord has prevented me from bearing children."

And, she's right, is she not? God is in control. She's learned that at least.

It is too bad she fails to apply this understanding to His promises.

You see, here is what has happened to Sarai... and it happens to us as well.

The problems seem bigger than the promises of God.

It is actually the opposite of the truth. God's promises last forever and the problems along the way all go away.

But, in the moment, we, like Sarai, can easily see the problem looming larger than the promise.

It is all wrong, but that is how it looks... because we don't see how God sees.

*Nancy and I and the fam were all in the Colorado Rockies just a couple of weeks ago.  
Long's Peak, at 14,259ft., is the tallest and most prominent peak in Rocky Mountain National Park.  
You can see it from everywhere... except when you walk behind a hill.  
Katie asked me at one point after such a hill had obscured the big mountain, "Why does that one look bigger?"  
You know what I said? "Because its closer... but it's not bigger. It's actually very small in comparison."  
Two days later we stood on the summit of Long's Peak... and everything else looked small.*

Someday you and I are going to stand with God on the mount of His promise and see all the little problems in their proper place. But, right now the problems often look bigger than the promises. Why? Because they're closer. That's all. They're not bigger. It is all wrong to see them that way. Eventually, we will learn... just as Sarai did 4000 years ago.

Now, when Sarai saw the problems bigger than the promise, what did she do?

She did what we often do. She took matters into her own hands... which is really very foolish.

She thought, "Here is a problem that is in the way of the promise. If God can't solve it, I will."

Just think about that thought for a minute. Have you ever had a thought like that?

She does not ask God for guidance. She does not pray or look to God's Word or even seek wise counsel.

Sarai comes up with a plan. This is a very human thing to do. We are great at plans.

How many you think first to meet problems with plans? If there's a problem it's, "What am I going to do?"

And, Sarai comes up with a not very good answer.

It would have been better if she had asked, "What is God doing?"

In fact, we learn in the story through Genesis that there is a good answer to that question. God was teaching her to trust Him.

But, she was not thinking about that. She was solving the problem for God.

It didn't go well. Oh, it worked! But then things went awry.

Abram slept with Hagar and Hagar got pregnant. So far so good.

But, then, Hagar developed an attitude toward Sarai (vs. 4) and Sarai blamed it all on Abram (vs. 5).

This is sort of like the Garden of Eden in reverse.

Men, lesson #1, "If your wife tells you to sleep with the maid, don't do it."

So, Abram, already leading poorly, lets Sarai do whatever she wants to Hagar. Sarai shows her how she feels.

The next thing that happens is pregnant Hagar runs off into the wilderness.

*In 1937 John Steinbeck wrote a little novel titled, "Of Mice and Men"*

*That title comes from a poem written by Robert Burns in 1786... after, while ploughing a field, he upturned a mouse's nest.*

*The poem is an apology to the mouse:*

*But mousey, you aren't alone*

*In proving foresight may be vain*

*The best laid schemes of mice and men*

*Often go awry*

*And leave us naught but grief and pain*

*For the promised joy*

Thus go the plans of mice and men... and women.

## **II. When we think God does not care.**

### **Gen. 16:7-16**

Now we are going to learn a lesson about the God who makes promises with Hagar.

And, today, we are likely to miss the most stunning and important part of this lesson...

Because we are not Hebrews in the wilderness recently escaped from Egypt.

Are you ready?

The most surprising aspect of this lesson in the wilderness to Hagar is that it is a lesson to Hagar.

Who is Hagar? She is an Egyptian. She is a nobody. She has not even been mentioned in the story until chapter 16.

Thus far, God has made no promise to her. She is not a part of God's people of the promise.

As far as we know she does not worship God. In this chapter she does not seek God!

Look at vs. 7-8. God finds her. God speaks to her.

God finds her in the wilderness... which, over and over in the Bible, is a place where God finds people.

Hagar, Moses, David, the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul...

they go away from civilization and people and God meets them there in the wilderness.

God brings His people Israel out into the wilderness to meet with Him and listen to Him.

It is often in the wilderness, away from money, stuff, people, iphones, facebook, distractions...

There, without knowing just how, we are made ready to be found by God.

There, in the wilderness, Hagar is quite sure (and with some good reasons) that God does not care about her.

But she's wrong.  
And, in that is the lesson.  
Do you think that you don't matter to God?  
Do you think that you are outside of God's promises? Outside of His protection?  
Do you think that you are too far gone? Too much of a sinner?  
Think again.

All that might be true. But, God is a God who seeks out the lost cause... the miserable sinner...  
the pregnant slave with the illegitimate child...  
She matters to God. He hears her cry. He sees her tears. He sees you.  
This is the great lesson of this half of the chapter... everything else is secondary.  
It is a shock that God cares about Hagar.  
But, now it is not a shock... because we are learning that this is who God is. He is the God who sees.

Consider the rest of the chapter.  
God begins with a question... a question He might ask you and I in our despair,  
"Where have you come from and where are you going?"  
Hagar, as is often the case with us when we are in deep depression, she answers the first part of the question...  
but she has no idea about the second.

Then God gives her a command. It is a hard command, difficult... to go back and submit to Sarai.  
But, as we have seen before in Genesis, and will see over and over in the Bible, God's commands are accompanied by promises.

So, God makes her a promise.  
God is going to multiply her family... like Abram's... in fact she is given part of the promise to Abram.  
God is going to give her a son... he's going to have a rough life, but he will survive.

We find the lessons to Hagar there in the wilderness in verse 11 and in verse 13.  
At the end of verse 11 God says, "You shall call his name Ishmael" = God hears  
"Because the Lord has heard your affliction."  
In verse 13, Hagar "called the name of the Lord who spoke to her 'You are El-roi'" = God who sees  
Then she says, lit., "Have I even seen Him who sees me?"  
She is marveling that she, Hagar the pregnant Egyptian slave woman, has seen the seeing God.  
So, she names the place "Beer-lahai-roi" = "the spring of the living one who sees me"  
He sees you.

Do you see?  
Our God who makes and keeps promises does not need our help to keep them.  
His promise is bigger than our problems.  
Our God who makes and keeps promises... He hears us and sees us when we are lost and hopeless and brings us back.  
Ps. 34:15, "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous. and His ears are open to their cry."  
That is who He is and what it means to have a God who keeps His promises.

**Pray**