

Genesis 20:1-18

Introduction

Example of not learning one's lesson: eating Amy's low carb chocolate peanut butter bars; everything in my being said they'd be awful based on experience, but I tried them anyway!

1. I feel like today's passage is a lot like this
2. It involves some deception on the part of Abraham and Sarah and it's all going to sound somewhat familiar because it's the second time they engage in the same behavior
3. You would have thought they learned their lesson the first time, but apparently not
4. The outline for today:
 - a. Abraham's and Sarah's deception put God's promises in jeopardy (20:1-2)
 - b. God intervened to preserve His promises (20:3-7)
 - c. King Abimelech rebuked Abraham and made restitution for his sin (20:8-16)
 - d. God forgave Abimelech and restored him and his household (20:17-18)

A. Once again, Abraham's and Sarah's deception puts God's promises in jeopardy (READ 20:1-2)

1. This event probably sounds familiar because it's not the first time Abraham and Sarah deceived someone in this manner:
 - a. Back in chapter 12 they deceived the Pharaoh of Egypt:
 - 1) Abraham's motives were clear: he feared that some Egyptian would find Sarah beautiful, kill him, and take her to be their wife
 - 2) We talked about how this might have been simply out of self-preservation, but could have also been an attempt to preserve God's promises to him (after all, if he were dead how would God's promises be fulfilled)
 - 3) In either case, Abraham's and Sarah's plan backfired, created some unintended consequences, and their deception actually PUT God's promises in jeopardy and He had to intervene to preserve His promises
 - 4) You would have thought they learned a lesson—the least of which is that God could protect His promises all on His own without their help
 - b. Here in chapter 20, Abraham deceived a different king, King Abimelech of Gerar, with the same ruse:
 - 1) We'll learn later in v. 11 that Abraham's motive is the same: he feared for his life because he believed there was no fear of God in Gerar
 - 2) Rather that reflect back on what happened the last time and trust the Lord, he once again deceptively presents Sarah as his sister rather than his wife
 - 3) And, as we might expect, the same thing happened: the king takes Sarah as his wife and adds her to his harem
2. Takeaway: sometimes God's people act as if they are not God's people:
 - a. So far, we've seen Abraham show periods of tremendous faith and trust, but also periods of weakness and a lack of trust; if I can paraphrase one commentator, we have post-covenant Abraham acting like pre-covenant Abraham

- b. This is a pattern we see throughout the OT with the patriarchs, kings, and Israel in general; God's people don't always act like God's people
- c. Probably one of the most glaring examples of this is King David who at times exercised incredible faith and obedience but at other times grave disobedience and moral failings
- d. Unfortunately, this is sometimes true of us as Christians—we don't always act like born-again believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit:
 - 1) Think about this: there are 27 books in the NT and 21 are epistles
 - 2) With the exception of Romans, Philemon, and maybe Philippians, all the rest are written primarily to address concerns over the behavior of believers!
 - 3) 1 Corinthians is the perfect example: Paul refers to them in his introduction as **"those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling"** but there were disagreements and divisions within the church, they were suing one another, some were involved with gross sexual immorality, they were abusing the Lord's Supper, the Spiritual gifts, and their Christian liberty, there was chaos in their worship gatherings, some were promoting false teaching
 - 4) Like the Corinthians, once we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ we are **"sanctified in Christ Jesus"** and are **"saints by calling"**—and we should act like it!
 - a) As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1, we should "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you [we] have been called"
 - b) Later in the chapter he wrote that we should no longer walk as the world walks or walk according to our former manner of life, but put off the old self and put on the new self which has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth
 - c) Back in college were referred to this as replacing our B.C. life with our A.D. life

<p>B. Once again, God intervened to preserve His promises (20:3-7)</p>
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- 1. In chapter 12, God got the attention of the pharaoh by bringing **"great plagues"** against him and his household, but here He appeared to King Abimelech in a dream and called him a **"dead man"** for taking Abraham's wife
- 2. Just like the pharaoh, the king pleaded ignorance:
 - a. He hadn't had relations with her yet
 - b. He had been lied to by both Abraham and Sarah
 - c. What he did had been done **"in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands"** (5)
 - d. In other words, he didn't deliberately and willfully take another man's wife
- 3. God's response to the king revealed three things about His character:
 - a. It revealed that He is an understanding God: He recognized that the king's sin wasn't willful and deliberate (6a): **"Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this..."**
 - b. It revealed His desire to protect Sarah from harm and the king from committing further sin (6b): **"and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her"**
 - c. It revealed His expectation of repentance and restoration (7): **"now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."**
- 4. Takeaway: ignorance does not make us innocent of sin, but God is understanding and merciful when our sin is unintentional:

- a. One of the things we tried to do with Kimberly and Katie when they disobeyed us was to take into account whether their disobedience was willful and deliberate or unknowing and unintentional; we then disciplined them accordingly
- b. Likewise, God treats these sins differently:
 - 1) Sin is still sin whether we know it or commit it unintentionally
 - 2) But, the OT Law treated intentional sins differently than unintentional ones (compare Leviticus 4:2-3 with Numbers 15:30-31)
 - 3) Paul reflected this principle in relationship to himself (READ 1 Timothy 1:12-15)
- c. Just as the king's ignorance didn't make him innocent of sin, and God still expected repentance and restoration; the same is true of us:
 - 1) 1 John 1:8-10 says that we deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin and make God a liar
 - 2) It then instructs us to confess our sins because God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness
 - 3) But, Hebrews 10:26-27 warns that if one goes on willfully repeating sin (based on the tense) after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but rather the terrifying expectation of judgment

C. King Abimelech rebuked Abraham and made restitution for his sin (READ 20:8-16)

- 1. The king's response and Abraham's response couldn't be more different here in these verses:
 - a. The king immediately obeys the LORD and goes above and beyond what the Lord expects:
 - 1) He gets up early in the morning, shares the details with his household, and confronts Abraham (8-10)
 - 2) He returned Sarah to Abraham, along with compensating him with sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and even invited him to settle anywhere he wanted to within the king's land (14-15)
 - 3) He even restored Sarah's honor (16): He gave her "brother" a thousand pieces of silver:
 - a) There may be a bit of sarcasm here by referring to Abraham as her brother, rather than her husband, since that's how she presented him to the king
 - b) A more literal rendering of the second half of the verse is **"Look, it is for you a covering of the eyes, for all who are with you, and with all, and you are set right"**
 - c) It's not clear what this means, but most translators believe the king was restoring her honor in the eyes of others
 - d) The ESV renders it this way: **"It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."**
 - b. Abraham's response is less impressive:
 - 1) He attempts to justify his deceit by saying he was afraid he'd be killed because he thought, **"surely there is no fear of God in this place..."**; this is especially ironic in light of how the king responded to God in the previous verses
 - 2) He further attempts to justify his deceit by relying upon a technicality: **"she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife"**
 - 3) He also seems to implicate God in his ruse by suggesting or implying that he had come up with his deceptive plan because God caused him to **"wander from my father's house"**:

- a) The word for wander here generally refers to wandering about, staggering, or straying
 - b) It's used of sheep wandering around in the field, and it was used of Hagar when she fled from Sarah and wandered around in the wilderness
 - c) It seems he's saying that he had to come up with a plan to protect himself because God led him to wander around in Canaan; doesn't this sound similar to when Adam seemed to imply that it was God's fault when he sinned because God gave him the woman?
 - d) One of the things we don't hear Abraham say is how sorry he was for leading Abimelech into sin
- 2. Takeaway: when those who don't know the Lord have to rebuke us, it's time for some serious self-evaluation and repentance:
 - a. Unbelievers love to point their fingers at us and accuse us of not acting like Christians, and most often such rebuke is meaningless because they wouldn't know Jesus if he walked up and smacked them on the back of their heads
 - b. However, there are times where our behavior isn't Christlike and the unsaved recognize it for what it is and call us out
 - c. The question for us is if and when this occurs, will we be more like Abraham and make excuses or more like Abimelech and repent and make restitution?

D. God forgave Abimelech and restored him and his household (READ 20:17-18)

- 1. One of the many things we can rely upon when it comes to God is His willingness to forgive and restore
- 2. We see that here and throughout the Bible:
 - a. God's history with Israel is one of Israel sinning, God chastising, Israel repenting, and God forgiving and restoring; in fact, it's the major theme of a number of OT books including Judges, Hosea, 2 Kings, and many of the prophets
 - b. We have the stories of God forgiving not just Israel, but David, Ahab, Hezekiah, Manasseh, the inhabitants of Nineveh, and even the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar
 - c. In the NT, we see Jesus forgive the woman caught in adultery, the paralytic, Peter, Paul, and even the mob that crucified Him!
 - d. The thread that runs through each of these examples, however, is repentance just as it is here with Abimelech
- 3. Takeaway: While God is righteous and must judge sin, He is also loving, compassionate and forgiving when we repent:
 - a. Psalm 86:5 says, **"For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You."**
 - b. I've heard that if you count up all the passages in the Bible that describe God's willingness and readiness to forgive, it amounts to well over 500 verses
 - c. The greatest example of God's readiness to forgive is the Gospel (Ephesians 1:7): **"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace"**
 - d. Even after we're saved, God is ready to forgive us when we sin: **"if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9)