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## Genesis

### Chapter 21 - God's Peace thru Problems

#### The Power of God's Presence (vs.1-7)

**Genesis 21:1-7:** Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Reminds me of Matthew 28:6,

“He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said...”

Just like He promised. And we see the promises of God being fulfilled. It is the presence of God that we long for because it is His promises that He is fulfilling. And when God shows up, there is salvation. When God shows up, there is forgiveness. There is comfort. Scripture reminds us that He is, in 2 Corinthians, the God of all comfort. Have you ever felt His presence? The God of all comfort. One of my concerns, especially in the day in which we live, is that clearly, as Jesus makes mention of this in the last days, that there are going to be false prophets that arise. Scripture is twisted and distorted in so many ways. And one of the ways that you know that Scripture is being distorted is that it doesn't fall in line with the characteristics or the trait or the nature of Christ. In other words, I've often said that Jesus is the Word of God, incarnate. So, the question is, what does the Word of God really look like? Well, you can define it from your perspective, but it's not the right definition. It has to be defined from the perspective of Christ. In other words, the Word of God has to look like Jesus. And if it doesn't,

then it's a false interpretation. And that's why Peter will say, Scripture's not a matter of one's own interpretation. But men were moved by the Spirit of God. And what it goes on to talk about, of course, is the fact that all the Scripture is, "*theopneustos*," God breathed by the Spirit of Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16) The Bible tells us that it is the Spirit of Christ that we receive. And so, He is the Spirit of Truth, and that's how we know what the right thing is.

My concern is that not only are there many different ways of twisting and distorting Scripture, as once again, Peter will make mention of this, that the unstable and the untaught distort Scripture. But even in good settings, I see Scripture being in perhaps a slight nuance, a goal and a wrong path. One of my concerns lately has been with, I've been seeing these new shows coming out with the different ones of the Old Testament. You have David and you have the great saints, "the saints," and the movie's coming out. And look, I'm thankful anytime truth is proclaimed. However, my concern is that it begins to elevate man. "David is great because he had a slingshot," but that's not what made him great. And those that were

in the Bible, if you read the Bible, weren't heroes. In fact, the thing that made them great is their trusting in God. And Paul will say specifically, "When I am weak, then He is strong." When you begin to elevate the individuals in the Old Testament, you misunderstand the passage. Because the purpose of the Old Testament specifically is to demonstrate that man can't, by his own nature, get to the point of righteousness, no matter how good he is. It doesn't matter if you're Abraham or Job. It doesn't matter if you're David. I mean, and Scripture is very careful to reveal all of the concerns and the problems of these individuals. And the reason why is, of course, they need a Savior. That's why Romans will say, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There's none righteous, not even one."

So, as we look at Abraham, I think one of the great things about the study of Abraham as we've been looking from Genesis 12 and now we're in Chapter 21, is we see this individual that is struggling with the same things that we struggle with. James will put it this way in James 5, "Now Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours." And the

point is that they're all struggling with these things. They're wrestling with these things. The question is, where does victory come from? And why is it that this man has a relationship with God and perhaps I don't? And we begin to see God moving him to the place of the relationship. And as we open up Scripture, God is taking us to that place at which we learn from these things, and then the Spirit of God begins to move in our hearts, and He begins to change our hearts to be in the relationship with Him. Once again, realizing our weakness and our inability to do this. From Genesis 12 to now 21, we've seen the failings of Abraham. Nevertheless, let me point to you some passages in Scripture that point to Abraham specifically as an example.

One of them is found in Isaiah 51. If you turn with me in Isaiah 51. The Book of Isaiah was written in the sense that God was calling Israel back. Interesting point. Here you have a whole nation that God has called for the sole purpose of being a light in the world, of being a blessing to the world, and once again, they're anything but, which is telling us that it's not the Law that can make you better.

And that's why Romans will say the Law, weak as it was, couldn't make you better. And as you go into Romans 8 in particular, it makes that wonderful statement at the very beginning, but there's therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. And one of the purposes of the Law is to show that no matter how hard you try, you can't save yourself, and you can't become a better person.

So, Isaiah 51 starts off this way in verse 1,

(Isaiah 51:1) “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness...”

And certainly, our hope and desire are that you're pursuing righteousness; I'm pursuing righteousness.

“... Who seek the LORD: ...”

Watch what he says here in the passage,

“... Look to the rock from which you were hewn...”

Have you ever heard the phrase, “chip off the old block”? It may have come from this.

“... And to the quarry from which you were dug.”

(Isaiah 51:2) “Look to Abraham your father  
And to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain;  
When he was but one I called him,  
Then I blessed him and multiplied him.”

(Isaiah 51:3) Indeed, the LORD will comfort Zion;  
He will comfort all her waste places.  
And her wilderness He will make like Eden,  
And her desert like the garden of the LORD;  
Joy and gladness will be found in her,  
Thanksgiving and sound of a melody.”

In other words, who is it that makes joy? It wasn't Abraham. But what He's saying is, “Look to Abraham and look at how he got joy. Watch how I'll bring joy in his life through the mistakes that he makes, through the sins that he commits. I'll bring him to Myself. He'll humble himself, ultimately. Watch how I worked in his life.” And that's fundamentally what He's saying. And the interesting thing, of course, about Abraham is this, that God calls him before the Law. And this is why we as Christians identify with Abraham as our father as well, because he was before the Law came into being. So, what you have is a

man walking by faith in the Old Testament even before the Law.

And then, turn with me to Romans 4; you'll see this in particular, in which Paul will give this example.

Paul will write this,

(Romans 4:1) “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?”

(Romans 4:2) For if Abraham was justified by works...”

That is to say, the Law.

“... he has something to boast about, but not before God.

(Romans 4:3) For what does the Scripture say?

“ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.””

So, therefore, and this particular passage makes reference specifically, Abraham became our father or the father of faith. And through him, all the world would be blessed, not just the Jews. All the nations of the earth would be blessed. God is working in this individual's life, not only that He would be blessed, but that He would be a blessing, once again, to all the earth, all the nations. “And

in you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”

(Genesis 12)

As you go on in the passage, He says this in verse 17,

(Romans 4:17) “(as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY

NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him

whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead

and calls into being that which does not exist.”

So, it goes on and makes reference, of course, that

Abraham believed in hope against hope. He believed, and

it was reckoned unto him as righteousness.

You'll see the same thing if you look with me in Galatians

3. Now, I dare say, if a movie were made out of Abraham,

it would kind of go in a picture of, well, he rescued Lot

from the captivity of those that came from the north, of

the Babylonians, and he rescued the city of Sodom and

Gomorrah, and you could see him on the horses or the

camels or whatever, which is basically a little over 300

men, and it's going to show his great works. Isn't it

interesting that when you read about him in the New

Testament, it doesn't talk about any of those things? You

know what it talks about? And he believed God. And God called him righteous because he put his trust in Him.

If you look in Galatians 3, it reads this way, in which verse 23 begins,

(Galatians 3:23) “But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

(Galatians 3:24) Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.”

In many ways, the Law is a teacher to lead us to Christ. One way, it demonstrates righteousness. So, you go, “What does righteousness look like?” Well, Christ appears on the scene, and you go, “That's righteousness.” Because you already have the standard that was listed in the Law, so it was a tutor to lead us to Christ. It also leads us to Christ in the sense of it convicts us that we can't be that righteous. So, then that causes us to look for a Savior. And so, the Law is a tutor to lead us to Christ.

(Galatians 3:25) “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

(Galatians 3:26) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

(Galatians 3:27) For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

(Galatians 3:28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Not talking about the fact that there's no difference between male and female, I just want to emphasize that. It's just saying that in the relationship with God, you're the same in His sight.

And then it says this in verse 29,

(Galatians 3:29) “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.”

Couldn't get clearer than that, could it?

You might ask yourself, “Why do I have to learn about Abraham?” And I'm going to tell you why, because this is the rock that you've been hewn. In other words, you, like Abraham, long for the righteousness of God, you're longing for God. God says, “Okay, we're going to chisel

you out.” And this is the way the chiseling process begins. And you begin to see God working in Abraham's life in such wonderful ways. Once again, not a perfect individual, but a person that wants to do the right thing, desires to follow God, and he begins to take those steps. When God tells him to do things, he begins to do them. And we see him fall. There's no doubt about it. But in that falling, he comes back to God. The Scripture says, a righteous man falls seven times, gets back up. And his desire is to get right with God.

So, as we come to this passage, what we have once again, which is very interesting to me, is the visitation of God. And in Genesis in particular, there are particular points in time in which God visits man. One of the times, of course, was right after when Adam and Eve sinned. And God visited and He goes, “Where are you?” Of course, God wasn't in darkness there, but He was wanting them to confess what has happened. And as we see, of course, God asks, “Who told you to do this?” And he goes, “The woman You gave me.” And after he says that, it is God who covers both Adam and Eve. Adam doesn't cover his

wife, but God covers them both. And it shows that when God appears, He clearly comes with a desire to cover our shame. And the same thing is true when you see the whole aspect of Noah and as he gets in the ark, God appears again. It's a very interesting text in which He closes the door to the ark. Remember that passage? It says the Lord closed the door to the ark. And you have this wonderful picture of God securing Noah's safety and his family, that He appears for the purpose of doing that. There's no other reason for Him to do that. I mean, obviously, the people of the world had the opportunity to change and to repent. Nevertheless, God is going to secure those.

And all the way through, what you see is not only the salvation of God, but also the encouragement of God. When Abraham's going through struggles and you come to the point of his great concern over Lot, in Chapter 18, God appears to him by the oaks of Mamre. And you realize that He not only appears to him, but He comes with a specific good news, "Your wife's going to have a child by this time next year." Talk about timing, because

Sodom and Gomorrah is going to be destroyed. He's not going to know what's happening to Lot. There's going to be grief and sorrow over that whole scenario.

Nevertheless, in the midst of that, God's going to bring good news. Sometimes you wonder, "Why does God hold off on the good news? Why doesn't He just give me the good news today?" And God goes, "We've got a right time." Remember, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and He'll exalt you, as Peter will say, at the right time. And it's God's timing that causes it to be far greater.

We come to a passage in which God has promised to make him great. He's promised to make Abraham a great nation. From Genesis 12, now to 21, it's been 25 years. So, Abraham was 75 years old at the time that God calls him, now 100 years old, and now finally the child comes. The promise comes. God visits. And you realize, "Wow, why so long? And why now?" This is very interesting. And what this particular passage is going to tell us is, why now? And we've seen this pattern throughout that God, literally, when you think about it, holds back certain

blessings for specific timing. And once again, I know that sometimes we, like perhaps Saul the king, would perceive that God was late. Nevertheless, He's not late. And He's not slow about His promises. But He's not only not wishing that any would perish, but God is giving good things. And every gift from God is good, Scripture tells us.

So, as we come to this, what we realize is in Chapter 21, when God finally visits again, it's the perfect time and God takes note. King James will actually use the word

“visiting,” the NAS will make reference to “take note”.

The reason why the difference is that the word itself has really a broad scope of definition. And in the passage, it can go from the fact that God visited for the purpose of overseeing, for taking care of, for ministering to, or just plain visit. And so, King James translates this as such.

But as the NAS will say,

(Genesis 21:1) “Then the LORD took note of Sarah...”

The passage then goes on to say,

(Genesis 21:2) “So Sarah conceived and bore a son...”

And you go, here again, I'm sure, "Finally!" They named the son as God had told them to about a year ago. He said, "This is the name of the son, *Yiṣḥāq*." which is actually kind of onomatopoeia in the sense that it's supposed to sound like somebody laughing. Can you imagine naming your kid, "Hahaha"? So, every time you call him, "Haha". So, I can imagine. But this is his name because why? Because she laughed.

But we can't just blame her. If you go back to Genesis 17, the same was true with Abraham.

(Genesis 17:15) "Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.

(Genesis 17:16) I will bless her..."

He's making reference to being a princess to great nations.

"I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

(Genesis 17:17) Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

(Genesis 17:18) And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!”

(Genesis 17:19) But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac...”

I guess that's the way they laughed back then. Anyway, that's his name.

And as you go on the passage, it says in verse 21,

(Genesis 17:21) “But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”

Now, most of us who are medical graduates know that it basically takes nine months for a child to come. So, you have basically a three-month play period between one year to the next. What's interesting in the context is, in the meantime, they take this journey, Abraham, with his concerns to different places and finds himself with the

Philistines, you remember, as we looked at the passage. So, now he finds himself with the Philistines, and he finds himself with king Abimelech. And he finds himself once again trying to protect himself and his wife when he comes into this foreign land because he's greatly concerned that Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, is going to kill him for his wife. So, "She's my sister." The only problem is now he's passing her off to him. And if he has relations with her, whose child does she have? This is God protecting not only Sarah and her purity, but it's God protecting the promise that He gave. So, as He comes to Abimelech, "Don't touch that woman or you're a dead man," Abimelech takes his hands off, and he goes, "You know, this guy lied to me." Abraham lied? I thought he was a great hero of faith. Abraham lied. And through that, God still preserves both Abraham and Sarah.

As we come to this passage, let me just make mention of this too, Chapter 18, when the angel of the Lord came to them at the oaks of Mamre, in verse 9, it's interesting, the angel said,

(Genesis 18:9) “... “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “There, in the tent.””

(Genesis 18:10) He said, “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son.” ...”

“This time next year.” So, we have all that, and once again, like I said, you go into the whole scenario of Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed and them going into the land of the Philistines, and you say to yourself, “Somebody has to be protecting this whole scenario, and you realize it's God. I say all this to emphasize this point: God's the hero. In all of the play that's happening, God's the One that's rescuing. God's the One that's blessing. And God's the One that brings joy into this household. Because things haven't been happening the way they should. It's going to take a miracle. And God's going to forgive. He's going to give life. He's going to save. He's going to comfort. And He's going to bring joy in this household by simply coming in to the household, by His presence.

There's a great passage in Psalm, if you look with me, in Psalm 16. The psalmist will say, "God's the One that preserves me. I have no good besides Him." (verse 2) That's pretty clear, isn't it? You can see His desire to be with the saints. You can see His desire to love the saints.

His statement is in verse 3,

(Psalm 16:3) "As for the saints who are in the earth, They are the majestic ones..."

In other words, these are the ones that have put their trust in God. They're saints because they put their trust in God, not because they did something great. That's a very interesting issue.

In fact, it says in verse 4,

(Psalm 16:4) "The sorrows of those who have bartered for another god will be multiplied..."

In other words, those who trusted anything else other than God will find sadness.

But certainly, those that have put their trust in the Lord, it says in verse 6,

(Psalm 16:6) “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places;

Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.”

The Psalmist is saying that there's great pleasure in being with God and with His people.

It says in verse 9,

(Psalm 16:9) “I have set the LORD continually before me;  
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

(Psalm 16:9) Therefore my heart is glad and my glory  
rejoices;

My flesh also will dwell securely.”

Now, you think about all those things that really makes for happiness. I don't have to worry about things. I don't have to be concerned about things. I put my trust in God. People go, “I don't know if that'll work.” Have you tried it? Have you just simply tried putting all of your trust in God and saying, “I'm going to trust in You.” I mean, I'm sure that we're all, in some respect, on a journey like Abraham. And so, what Scripture is saying is God is chiseling this rock out. And what's the outcome? Well, He's actually

molding you into the image of His Son. The foundation is one who seeks for God and wants to put your trust in God, then God begins to pull out from that foundation, from that particular quarry, and He says, “Now, this is what we're going to do. We're going to mold you into the image of My Son.”

The passage reads this way, if you look in verse 11, (Psalm 16:11) “You will make known to me the path of life;

In Your presence is fullness of joy;

In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

Now, I want to emphasize the fact that the word “pleasures” here that's being used is also used in Psalm 133:1, which means that in that particular context, it starts off,

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”

Well, almost every time it's mentioned, it's mentioned in context of relationships; in which there's unity; in which there's generosity; in which there's agreement. And what

it's talking about is that only God, His right hand, can make relationships agreeable, pleasant, and wonderful to be with. You ever wonder why in households they're in disarray, and they're in disruption? They didn't invite God to the table. Because of God's presence, in His presence, He can cause the relationships to be united. And this is fundamentally the principle of Philippians 2, that if there's any kind of fellowship, the joy has to be made complete; it's having the same mind as Christ. And it's in so doing that, behold how wonderful and how pleasurable it is to be in the presence of God, because that's what He creates.

What we have here in Genesis 21 is literally transformational in the sense that the family was messing up. He was misrepresenting himself. He had fallen into problems again. And because of that, I'm sure there was a rift between him and his wife again. God comes into the picture. He visits them. And this child is born. Everything changes. Everybody's starting to laugh again. In fact, just read the text with me.

It reads this way in Chapter 21,

(Genesis 21:1) “Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.”

I wonder why Scripture wants to repeat that. Take Him at His word, whatever He says.

Is it possible that God can give you fullness of joy? Yes. Then what is it you need to do in order for that to happen? Because He gives you a promise, but He gives you the contingency, “But you need to do this in order for it to happen.” For instance, James 4 says, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” Is that true? I don't know. Have you drawn near to Him? What does that mean? Well, He starts off by saying, “Repent of your sins, first of all, and don't cling on to the things of the world anymore.” So, these stages, you begin to see, is fundamentally what Abraham's wrestling with. What causes God to visit?

And if you look in Genesis 21:1, how does it start off?

“Then...”

You see that little word, “then”? That's telling us that there's either a succession or a sequence of events that have taken place that caused this visitation to happen. What causes God to appear in your life? What causes Him to be in your presence? What causes the joy to now happen, or life to exist? “In Him is life,” Scripture says. So, where does this child come from? Well, if you remember, with Abimelech, not only was God protecting her, but he closed all the wombs of the women in the Philistine area until he made right, Abimelech gave back Sarah, and until Abraham prayed, then things became right. I just thought it so interesting, so many places in this, as we've been watching through, there are literally sometimes months, sometimes years of silence between God and Abraham. That's interesting, don't you think? But you can almost count on it. You can almost set your watch to it. When Abraham does certain things, God shows up.

I'll give you an example. When Abraham goes down to Egypt, and instead of really asking God, “What do I do in the midst of the famine?” We see a silence going on. In that particular passage, then it kind of segues into, as he

deals with the whole Pharaoh issue, he's concerned about Lot. He then turns to Lot, and he says, "You can have any part of the land you want to." And what we know is that the fundamental calling to Abraham was, "I just want you to come out from your family." But he brings Lot with him.

In Chapter 13, what's interesting is that Lot chooses Sodom and Gomorrah to live in. And the text says in Genesis 13:14 that Lot separated himself from Abraham. The next verse is, "Then God spoke to Abraham." What you're going to see throughout is God's given you cues of this chiseling aspect. And your question is, "Wow, I wish I could have a relationship like Abraham has." Okay, let's go through it. So, the first thing you need to do is separate from the longings of the world. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. You've got to separate yourself from these things. "It's too hard. I can't do that." You want the presence of God? In His presence is fullness of joy. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore. That means the "pleasures forevermore" is talking about, is it God that heals relationships? Can God

actually heal a relationship? Or do you think you're actually fixing relationships? “Well, I got to fix it because I got to be with them, I got to perform for them, I got to do the things that they're pleased with.” How about doing this? How about pleasing God and watching Him fix the relationship. Separate yourself. If they're going one way, you go the right way. You don't go that way. You take those stands, watch God do a healing without you. Remember, He creates the universe without you, so this is not a big problem to Him. His arm is not so short that it cannot save. So, the first thing that you see is God then appears to Him and begins to give the great promises to Him at that juncture. Now, throughout the process, Abraham is still working through things.

And the second thing that he has to do, if you look in chapter 15, it starts off in verse 1, that God came to Abraham. You go, “Why did He come to him at that time?” Well, if you look at the end of 14, it's obvious. Because what Abraham did everything that God told him to do, even though it was highly sacrificial to him. And it was very difficult for him to do. He did everything that

God told him to do. Are you doing everything that God told you to do? “Well, I don't know everything that God wants me.” I know that. But are you doing everything you know that God is telling you to do?

Because once you do, if you look at the beginning of Chapter 15, it specifically is worded this way in the text, (Genesis 15:1) “After these things...”

Now, once again, what things is he talking about? And if you look at the end of Chapter 14, what you have is Abraham saying, “I'm not going to take anything from the world. I'm not going to get any credit from the world. I'm not going to be reliant upon the world or the things that they give me.” And he turns to the king of Sodom, and he says, “I don't want any of your stuff.” That's pretty interesting. And so, 17 is the same way. He comes into this great sacrifice in which God says, “You've got to circumcise all your people.” And that in and of itself is going to be, I mean, what's he have, over 300 men? And then his son Ishmael, on top of that, himself. Have you ever read a Scripture, and you go, “God, why don't You ask me to do something really easy?” But He turns to His

disciples, and says, "Take up your cross and follow Me." I mean, there's nothing easy about that. "The foxes have holes, the birds have nests, the Son of Man doesn't have a place to lay his head. If you're going to follow Me, you're going to have to be willing to let go of things." And He's not going to tell you to let go of everything, but He is going to tell you to let go of anything that's holding you back from the relationship.

So, in Chapter 17, it says,

(Genesis 17:23) "Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all the servants who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day, as God had said to him."

Now, watch Chapter 18.

(Genesis 18:1) "Now the LORD appeared to him..."

I don't know if you're seeing a pattern. But fundamentally, there's a pattern here, and that is every time he does what God tells him to do, gets right with

God, corrects things that he knows he needs to correct, God appears.

And so, the same thing is true in Genesis 21, where you have the “then”. Why the “then”? Well, up to this point, Abraham hasn't even been talking to God. But it was Abraham's idea to pray for Abimelech. I mean, I don't see anywhere in Chapter 20 where it says, “And God told Abraham to pray for the king of the Philistines, Abimelech.” I don't see God saying that. However, Abraham did. Why would he do that? Well, one is God has made it known to him that this is an innocent man. But two, there was a promise and a calling that God made, and had placed on Abraham right from the very start. And that is, “I'm going to bless you and I'm going to make you a blessing to all the nations.” Now, here's the point- that God is calling Abraham to minister beyond his little narrow sphere.

There's an interesting phenomenon that I think happens in all of our lives, and that is that we get caught up in the acquisition of our desires. That is to say, you get a specific thing that you want more than anything else. And you get

so focused on that thing that you miss the point. And the point is that God is not willing that any should perish. For God so loved the world. However, we get focused on this acquisition of our desires and oftentimes on the solution to our concerns, whatever it is that you're concerned with. And in that fixation, what begins to happen is things like our character go by the wayside and things like having a relationship with God seems to be eclipsed by our focus and our fixation on, "I've got to get that thing." Now, in the life of Abraham and Sarah, it was a good thing. It was a son. They wanted a son more than anything else. And wanting children and having children, it's not a bad thing. The only problem is in the process of getting fixated on that one thing, they began to try to work things out themselves. You know, "You've got to take Hagar or try to work things out. Maybe it's Lot," or whatever. But he not only begins to try, but he gets so fixated on getting that one thing that he becomes callous towards others. It's a subtle thing. You know, what's so wrong with nepotism? Well, the only problem is that with that nepotism and favoritism, that is to say in showing favoritism to your family members or people that you love more, Jesus will

say, "Look, here's the deal- even Gentiles are nice to people that are nice to them." But we get caught in that realm, and in that realm, we become, as Ephesians 4 would say, callous towards everybody else. We actually become protective of that thing that we want, and we push other people away. We really don't care.

Fundamentally, Abraham was so focused on getting this son that he really was willing to show bad tendencies towards his wife. I mean, why would you set up your wife to take the fall for you? Why would you do something like that? Why would you put her life in jeopardy? Why would you put her purity in jeopardy? Why would you do that? But you see, he's so focused on it that he becomes calloused towards those other things. So, is he really concerned for people like Abimelech? No, Abimelech's a godless guy. So, he comes into the nations, and Abimelech goes, "Your God came to me in the middle of the night." He says, "You lied to me. You told me that it was your sister. Now, I'm in trouble. And in the integrity of my heart, I didn't mean to do that." And Abraham goes, "I thought you guys were all sinners." And God goes,

“Yeah. But you were too. And this is what you need to do—you need to pray for them.”

And so, if you look at the passage here, it reads,

(Genesis 20:17) “Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children.”

(Genesis 20:18) “For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.”

What is the passage telling us? Well, it's not only showing us God's perfect timing; I think what's wonderful about this picture is when Sarah finally bears this child, and they continue in the Philistine neighborhood, by the way, but all the other women in the neighborhood are also having children too. It kind of reminds me of that wonderful text in Proverbs, “It's the blessings of the Lord that make rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.” You realize that God is just as concerned for those around as He is for Sarah. And in order for there to be real joy, you know, if one person buys a Cadillac, the neighbor gets jealous. Everybody's given a Cadillac; everybody's happy. Just thinking

materialistically. But the point is that within the context, what you see is God is bringing joy in the whole realm. The timing was done in such a way that not only is He preserving, is He saving, but He's bringing joy and everybody's really happy in this particular setting. When? Now. Why? Because he prayed. And this is almost God's final test of Abraham in bringing him to the point, because not only did he have to separate from the things of the world, not only did he have to rely upon God and not on man, and not only did he have to come to a point in which he'd be willing to sacrificially obey God no matter how difficult or how hard it would be, but now he's going to have to come and he's going to have to care for somebody else more or as much than he would for his own family. He's got to pray for a non-family member. Do we think that way? I think our perception is, "If I start praying for other people and I'm not praying for my family, who's going to take care of my family?" And God, I think, literally is telling us, "If you love the world with Me, I'll take care of your family."

There's an interesting passage, and I'm not going to have you turn there because we're running out of time, but in James 5, it says, "So, pray for one another that you may be healed." Let's back up. It doesn't say, "Pray for you." It says, "Pray for one another, that you may be healed." This is going to surprise you. But God is more interested in who you are than what you get materialistically. And God's going to hold back the material blessings, the physical blessings that you so long for. He's willing to hold those back to get you right; to get you thinking right; to get you thinking about others and not yourself; to get you sacrificing for others and not becoming egocentric. God is working in your life and He's going to bring you to a point in which you're going to care for other people and not just those in your little narrow perspective. You'll start looking at everybody in the sense of, "God loves them too, God loves them too."

The way the passage goes on is,

(Genesis 21:2) "So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time..."

You know, old age, it must be late. No, right on time.

“... of which God had spoken to him.

(Genesis 21:3) Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore...”

You almost feel like God is kind of stretching this out. Okay, God called Abraham. He told him He was going to give him a son. He said it was going to not be through Hagar, but through Sarah. He just wants to make it clear. “Haha” was born.

(Genesis 21:4) “Then Abraham circumcised his son...”

Here again, the obedience.

“... Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.”

Which is that wonderful picture of resurrection; 7 days being the completed of the week, 8th day being the beginning of a new week. So, it's that wonderful picture of resurrection in the Old Testament.

(Genesis 21:5) Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

(Genesis 21:6) Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.

(Genesis 21:7) And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.""

You pray for other people, and what? You'll lose out? I don't think so. God will begin to unite the neighborhood. God will bring joy to the family and joy specifically to you. God works in the lives of those, and as Paul will say, God has made us ambassadors for Christ. It's interesting when he writes to the Corinthians in particular, he says, "I just want to let you know that you're my children." Now, what would cause a Jewish guy that doesn't like Gentiles to adopt Gentile kids? And really obstinate ones, because the Corinthians were just a mess. But he turns to them, and he goes, "I love you just as much as I would my own kid." You might try that. You might care; you might work on having the heart of Christ who loves the world and see how that just might benefit you.

**Closing Prayer:**

Father, we give You thanks for Your word and for the truth of it. We realize that there's a lot of chiseling that You have to do in our lives and there are issues that we deal with all along the way. We have our favoritism, we have our desires, we have our pursuits, but You are gradually taking them away, moving them off of us, these burdens that would weigh us down, that would cause us to no longer be close to You, that would deter us and eclipse a relationship with You. Father, You're moving in our lives.

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, what I'm asking you to do is examine your life and examine your heart. And I'm just asking this one simple question, what is it that's keeping you from a relationship with God? I mean, in His presence, there's fullness of joy, at His right hand; behold how good, how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity. Is it possible that God can fix things? Is it possible that God's the hero?