

All God's Promises ▪ Genesis 21

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Some of you on Monday afternoon were wearing these, looking at the Solar Eclipse.

If you missed Monday, you have to wait till 2045 for the next eclipse. It still won't be seen in totality from SC.

If you want to see the full solar eclipse from southern US, you need to be around in 2078.

You can do the math to see how old you will be in 2078 (it's 54 years)

I will be 98 years old....just two years shy of how old Abraham is in Gen. 21.

› If I make it to 98 years old, there would be one single factor in place: a massive supply of God's grace.

- Grace is all over this chapter. It's all over the story of Abraham.

Many years walking by faith require much grace.

Friends, if you are in need of a fresh reminder of God's grace at work—I think Gen. 21 has it for you.

One commentator: "this narrative....illuminates the mixture of faith and doubt, joy and jealousy, love and hatred that characterized the human predicament. But above all, God proves himself dependable and gracious." (G. Wenham)

God's grace in fulfilling his word (1-7)

- The text begins with: "The Lord "visited" Sarah.
- "Visited" is another way of saying that God is taking action: God can visit for help or to judge.

Simply put, one's destiny is changed when the Lord visits.

- This visitation did not happen in a vacuum—it's God fulfilling his Word...his prior promise to give Abraham and Sarah their own child. (Ch 12-ff)
- The first verses highlight that God is faithful "as he promised; which God has spoken".

In response to God's faithfulness, we see two things:

—Obedience (v4)

—Joy (v6)

- We know from that, there are two kinds of laughter: poking fun at, or sharing the joy with.

In our culture, seeing a woman in her 90's pushing around a stroller with her own child might make people laugh; being in the Guinness Book of records for something unbelievable might cause some to chuckle.

- But in Sarah's culture being barren was a high shame....and now that is finally lifted.

› *This is the sound of joy at what God does! It's the joy of seeing grace at work.*

Friends, does thinking of what God does give you joy?

If not, what does?

- The point of these opening verses:

God is not bound by time, circumstances or old age. He is bound by one thing: His Promises

Proverbs 30:5 (ESV)

Every word of God proves true;

This is what separates the Creator from the Creature. Can any person claim this? Can you claim that all your words have proven true, this week, month, year?

Even at our best we forget, or have to back out of plans.

And at our worst we overexaggerate, embellish, or flat out lie....kind of like Abraham in the last chapter.

One commentator: “This is the most visible fulfillment of any promises so far, and central” (Gordon Wenham).

Without this happening, there is no nation, no Israel, Moses, David...and no Christ.

And *no Christ*, means *no grace*.

- › Thank God that he always fulfills his Word.

(Calvin) “He (God) never feeds men with empty promises.”

God’s grace toward the outcast (8-21)

- The story takes its first major turn in v8.
- Abraham is throwing a big party.
- Apparently in the ancient world, birthdays were not a big celebration, but when a child stopped nursing it was.

In the ancient world, infant mortality was so high that when a child stopped nursing it was a major milestone. It gave hope that this life will last!

What brings the party to a screeching halt: A teenage boy laughing

- We don’t know exactly what this looked like.
 - Maybe he was making fun of Isaac
 - Or maybe playing with Isaac but in a way that could deceive him or cause harm
- (Gal. 4:29) interprets his actions at “persecuting”.

(Alan Ross) “Ishmael probably did not take the child or the promise seriously”.

- In other words, this mocking was *taking grace lightly*.

There may be a tucked in application for us: *be very careful what we laugh at...what we take humor in. It matters before God!*

- The inner *Mama Bear* of Sarah comes out quick (v10)

V10 tells us that Sarah goes “Barney Fife” and “nips it in the bud”.

She sees Ismael as a threat to her son’s full inheritance.

The threat has to go.

These actions and words of Sarah is used by Paul in the NT to show what the church needs to do with any false teaching that distorts the gospel—get rid of the threat (Gal. 4:30)

Anything that threatens the gospel of pure grace needs to be cast out.

- Now here is where Abraham feels torn. This is his son—his firstborn son, but he probably wants peace with his wife.

What is the right decision?

Have you ever felt torn? Relationally? Two people you love are in a conflict; whose side you take?

- Enter 3 words that will push him to the right decision.

(V12) But God said.....

How do you make any decision, especially a major one?

“What does God say.....”

This is not asking that God would speak audibly (that can be the easy way out!)

—*I’m talking about the Bible being the authority in our lives.*

This also makes what a Man of Faith looks like—he is always driven by Gods Word.

- Abraham demonstrates a pattern of obeying God.
- The Ishmael story takes a very dramatic turn in v15—Hagar and Ismael run out of water.

I used to say when I was a teenage boy and got thirsty, “Ma, I’m dying of thirst” But this is the real thing.

- It was so critical that Hagar had to put a distance between her and her son since she could not bear the sight of seeing him die.

It's a crisis moment for sure.

Yet God often draws near in crisis moments; he provides the water for Hagar and Ishmael to survive.

› Why does God do this? *Because he is gracious!*

- This is what we call common grace.

God provides necessities of life, even skills—the stuff to make life better - even marriage.

This story would have struck a chord with Moses leading God's people in the wilderness. It's the lesser to the greater. If God has such mercy and compassion for those not his chosen people...how much more will he do for you?

Christian friends, we can apply the lesser to greater. If God cares for billions of people by common grace...how much more does he care for you, whom his Son died for?

Wrap your heart around the promise of

Romans 8:31–32 ESV

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

God's grace in the land (22-34)

- It's like the pause button was pushed in Gen. 20—Abimelech.
- Now the play button resumes.
- Abimelech returns and asks to enter a treaty with Abraham. Abraham seeks peace, but also demands that a well belonging to him, rightfully be returned. Ownership is restored, gifts are given, a covenant is made. Everyone is happy.

Most importantly: *Abraham is in the land God promised!*

- In case we think this it is just Abraham with some slick negotiation skills—we miss the main point: This all of Grace.

Signs of Grace:

First, grace of God's presence (v22)

- The parting command of Jesus to his church ends with the promise of grace.

Matthew 28:20 (ESV)

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

There is really no greater grace than to know God is with us!

- Secondly, grace in the work (v33).
- Abraham gets to work in the land: he plants a tree.

Why? What is the meaning?

—Trees in the Bible can be a symbol representing blessing and God’s favor (Ps. 1; Jer. 17:7-8) - maybe he anticipates that.

—Maybe as a memorial to recall.

—Maybe just practical: It will get hot, when I return.

Planting a tree says: I have hope for the future.

- But I really don’t know exactly why this tree was put there.

Yet there is another tree in the Bible, we do know the exact reason it was planted. No doubt.

The tree: the wood that the cross Jesus died on was made from.

1 Peter 2:24 ESV

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Jesus’ work goes way beyond Abraham: *He does not plant a tree, but gives his life up on it!*

It’s on that tree... the cross.... that we see God’s promises coming together:

The offspring of Abraham, dying on a cross—to bring what’s most needed: forgiveness and grace.

If you need God’s saving grace, forgiving grace—there is only one place to look: the Savior who bled and died and who bore sins in his body on the tree.

- › There is no greater grace than this!

Finally, there is worship (v33).

Notice a new title of God is introduced.

“Everlasting God” echoes in grace. It reminds us that God stands outside of time—is not controlled by a clock.

If you are in need of a fresh supply of Grace—even if you are fainting, listen to what Isaiah says, and rest in the Everlasting God.

Isaiah 40:28–31 ESV

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

Conclusion:

Friends, I know I’m in need of a massive supply of God’s grace, just to make it through this day, and go into this week.

As we walk through Genesis, we keep leaning on rock solid truth. God is always proving himself dependable and gracious. And he is the same and has not changed.