

Thought for Sunday 21st March 2021

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Read Genesis 21:1-33 Today we look at the birth of Isaac, next Sunday we will finish our look at Abraham's life. Over the past few weeks we have seen the Lord's promises to Abraham, starting in 12:2, that he *'will make him into a great nation and would bless him.'* That Abraham would have a son, a family, and that his descendants would be so numerous that no-one would be able to count them, like the stars in the sky, or grains of sand on the sea shore. Abraham, and Sarah, struggled to believe the Lord because they were old, and it was believed Sarah was past child bearing age (18:11). We know that Abraham had a child, Ishmael, with Sarah's slave, Hagar, but that wasn't part of God's promise, Abraham was 90 then and he was to have to wait a further ten years for Abraham to see the promise that God made with him. Abraham is now 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old, now they have the child they were promised. When God makes a promise, we have to be patient, the Lord's timing is not our timing, but if the Lord says something is going to happen, then it will happen. The problem we humans what God's promises to happen now! Remember Psalm 90:4; *'A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by.'* Or, 2 Peter 3:8; *'With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.'* God's timing is always perfect. I have to be honest and say that at 75 the idea of having a baby doesn't enthrall me, sleepless nights etc. but for Sarah it is different, verse 6; *'Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.' and she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'* And Sarah was to only have the one child. Chapter 23 tells us Sarah died aged one hundred and twenty-seven years old. So Sarah was to see her son grow up to be a man. Here at the beginning of chapter 21 we see that when Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him to. Verses 8-20 tell of how Sarah had Hagar and Ishmael sent away, out into the desert. Sarah appears unconcerned for either of them, but God was, as was Abraham, verse 11; *'The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.'* God is concerned about each and every one of us. I am reminded of the parable of the lost sheep that Jesus told in **Matthew 18:10-14 read...** verse 14 says; *'your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.'* Nothing has changed, as it was in Jesus time, so it was in Abraham's time and in our time also, Hebrews 13:8; *'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.'* God heard Ishmael's cry and reached down into the situation; *'the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter, do not be afraid; God has heard...'* The truth is that God not only hears, he also responds, and God expects a response from us. here we see the angel say to Hagar; *'God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.'* God didn't just do it, he told Hagar what she had to do, he gave her a task, she had something to do. In the story of the healing at the pool in John 5:1-15 we see Jesus ask the question of the invalid; *'Do you want to get well?'* *'Sir,' the invalid replied, 'I have no-one to help me...'* and so Jesus healed him, more often than not, in many of the healings that we read of, Jesus tells people to do something to see the miracle happen. The ten lepers had to go and show themselves to the priests, Luke 17:11-19. The man born blind, John 9:1-12 had to go and *'wash in the pool of Siloam.'* We are all called to respond in one way or another, then the Lord can use us, and bless us. At the end of chapter 21 verse 22 onwards, we see Abraham have another encounter with Abimelech. Abimelech was king of Gerar (20:1), and we are not told anything about him that was not pleasant, yes, he took Sarah as his wife, that was the way of the world in that area at that time, but Abimelech

never slept with her, and in fact hadn't realised that she was Abraham's wife, as we read the other week. In fact we are told in chapter 20 that God stopped him sleeping with Sarah, and it appears that Abimelech respected Abraham. Abraham was after all living in his country, Abimelech had given him permission to live there, and now Abimelech is asking Abraham to show the same kindness that he has shown to him. You would think that would be natural, and Abraham responds; *'I swear it.'* Then Abraham then goes straight into a complaint; *'Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized. But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today.'* Both here and in chapter 20 Abimelech appears to be an honourable man, and appears to recognise that Abraham's God is looking after Abraham, verse 22: *'God is with you in everything you do.'* And when Abraham brings sheep and cattle and gives them to Abimelech, he is asked; *'What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?'* Abraham has to explain and says; *'Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well.'* The chapter ends; *'Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.'* As we will see next week, Abraham stayed there for 13 years, but as they say, that is for another time. As we reach the fifth Sunday in Lent, how are we doing? Have we given something up, chocolate, alcohol... something that is not really a big deal, or have we decided to do something for others, in fact give up some of our time for someone else, to bless them. I pray you have blessed someone, that ay you will be blessed also. Amen.

Blessed be Your name in the land that is plentiful,
Where Your streams of abundance flow,
Blessed be Your name. And blessed be Your name
when I'm found in the desert place,
Though I walk through the wilderness,
Blessed be Your name.

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say:

*Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your glorious name.*

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be',
Blessed be Your name. And blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering,
Though there's pain in the offering,
Blessed be Your name.

You give and take away, You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say: Lord, blessed be Your name