God's Presence is the Difference (Part 1)

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Preacher: Jeff Jackson

[0:00] Okay, I want to ask you something before I launch in here. So this isn't rhetorical.

! Alright, how are you working against tuning out, glossing over?
I'm not saying I've seen that. I have seen that before. As a pastor, you can't help it. But I'm not asking that for that reason this morning. But I am asking you, how do you bring your heart to work against singing these songs and it just being something that we're doing so that you really are very conscious of offering, making an offering to Jesus Christ from your heart?
I am singing something that is doctrinally sound. That is, it corresponds to the truth of God and that truth is motivating my heart to sing to Him.
My motivation is because I realize I am giving God's truth back to Him as a gift offering of my own heart. That's singing.
[1:29] That's worship in song. Anything less than that, He doesn't receive it. It has to be of the Spirit and it has to be of truth. And so I want to ask you, as we do this together as a congregation, Greg and I will often give you these little ditties here, call it a little ditty, to help us think carefully about what we're doing as a congregation.

This is one of the reasons that we tell people who tell us, you know, I can do this at home. And I had a conversation with someone within the last couple of weeks, where they told me I was actually having a procedure done at the hospital and I was talking it up with this person, this tech doing it, and, you know, turned it to spiritual things and asked them about that.
And, oh, yes, I'm a Christian. And I haven't been to church in years, but I do my own worship ever since COVID. I've just gotten in the habit of doing my own worship.
I know I need to get back to church, this person said, but, and then, and I thought, wow, you're missing. So I said that. I said, boy, what you're missing out on by not joining in with God's people is monumental.
Got silent for quite some time after that. But, you know, folks, doing this together is a privilege. It is a privilege for us to be here and to be able to do this.
[2:59] People can't do this all over the world. I've told you the story before about some missionaries who related to us that in China, there are congregations that gather secretly all over the country in an underground fashion.

Some of them literally. And when they come together, because it's such a populous place, many times when they sing, they will open up and they will watch and they will sing the words and they will mouth the words.
They don't sing it because they can't. But they're singing it in their heart. They're just not giving voice. Now think about that. This is a privilege.
So be blessed, friends, and don't take for granted it all. Don't let your heart do that. Don't let your heart drift into that kind of thing when we stand together to sing the glory of Jesus in song because we're going to be doing a lot of that in heaven.
Okay, now that's done. So let's go to chapter 21 in Genesis. Chapter 21. Now, we're not going to do the whole chapter.
[4:05] I'm going to read it. We're going to take it in two parts. I'll do the first part this morning and then we'll come back and I'll do, because we'll be planning to take the table, the Lord's table next Sunday.

I'll be doing something along those lines as Abraham makes a covenant with Abimelech in the last part of the chapter. We'll be taking these first two sections where Isaac will be born and then we have Abraham having to turn out Hagar and Ishmael.

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And what does that have to do with anything going on with Isaac's birth? All right? So let me read through the part that we'll be taking care of this morning, beginning in verse 1. 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.
[5:23] Now Abraham was 100 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. Not at me, but with me. And she said, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?
Yet I have born him a son in his old age. Well, the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.
And now this interesting transition. Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Your translation may say a little different there.
We'll deal with that when we come to it. Therefore she said to Abraham, Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.
[6:22] Well, the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. But God said to Abraham, Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid.

Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her. For through Isaac, your descendants shall be named. And of the son of the maid, I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant.
Your, literally, seed. So Abraham, in verse 14, rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy and sent her away.
And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. Now when the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes.
Then she went and sat down opposite him about a bow shot away. For she said, Do not let me see the boy die. And she sat opposite him and lifted up her voice and she wept.
[7:34] Well, God heard the lad crying. So Ishmael is crying as well. And the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, What is the matter with you, Hagar?

Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.
Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink. God was with the lad.
And he grew. And he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. He lived in the wilderness of Paran. And his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.
Well, dealing with this passage this morning, we'll start with this title, God's Presence is the Difference. As I mentioned to you in the psalm earlier, God's presence is the difference.
[8:44] And we're joining Abraham and Sarah at a happy time. Lots of stuff's been going on in their lives. They've had a lot of hardship and a lot of things going on.

But we've seen from his life the reality that we all face. Even in this happy moment, there are other moments. Not so happy.
Life is hard and harsh. And Abraham and Sarah have not been immune to that reality. Even though this is a very joyous occasion.
We have that same mixture here in our passage as the story takes us from Abraham's failure in chapter 20. Even though we saw some repentance in his life at the end of that chapter.
Now to chapter 21, where God shows us several important things, folks, that we can kind of glean and hold on to. And this will form the structure of my outline for this passage in just a moment that I'll share with you.
[9:47] But look at this. We're seeing Abraham's worship of God for his promise fulfilled. That's in the first part of the passage as they celebrate Isaac's birth.

Then we have Abraham's worship of God and obedience, even in his grief over Ishmael. Abraham moved quickly to obey the Lord when the Lord made it clear to him that even though Sarah's heart and character in this were in question, she wasn't handling it well, what she was saying was correct.

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And so Abraham had to act on what God told him to do about putting Hagar and Ishmael out of his household. And it grieved him, but he followed through an obedient faith.
And then finally, Abraham's worship of God and his repentant faith in the Lord and in his goodness. And that happens as he strikes this covenant with Abimelech. We'll talk about that, God willing, next Sunday.
Now, since the very moment God drew Abraham to himself in saving faith, many of you can have that same testimony, God brought Abraham through many varied life lessons about living by the promises of God.
[11:03] That is, living not by sight, putting our eyes on earthly things, but by faith. Making the priorities of God and the priorities of heaven and the priorities of our life each day so that they define and dictate to us how we move about the most menial tasks in life from the way we do our jobs, the way we relate to people, the kind of priority we give to money and how that money goes out of our household.

All those different kinds of things. Abraham had that too. He was a very wealthy man. Now, these lessons are going to continue in his life. He is about to face the most challenging lesson of all.
He will not face anything in his life more challenging than what he's about to face at 100 years old when God instructs him to take his son's life and give him as an offering to God.
That's coming. That's next. And God's been getting him ready for that for 25 years. Because even though Abraham had no clue that was coming, God knew.
And it's been a work of grace that God's been doing that in his life. So like us, I'm just simply saying, Abraham knows, folks, the peaks and the valleys of living by faith in God.
[12:22] Becoming a Christian does not absolve you from life's trials and troubles, from failures and faltering, stumbling. Abraham is called, just as we are, to live by what God has said.

Now, that's the root of what this sermon is about. The presence of God in your life, the presence of God in my life, as we seek to live by what God has said.
We are living by the foundation that God has made for us in His wisdom and His Word. That's our foundation. That's what we sink our feet into. That becomes the cement that keeps us steady in life. To fight against the things, self, sin, Satan, that want to derail us from trusting in the Lord. Now, where did this all begin in terms of Abraham's life with God and what God said?
Now, look. Look with me at chapter 12 and be reminded about how all of this was launched by the Lord taking initiative in Abraham's life.
[13:29] Abraham was a moon worshiper in Ur. He was worshiping the idols of his day. And he got that from his father. But in chapter 12, verse 1, we see something happen.

Now, the Lord said to Abram, before he changed his name to Abraham, go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you.
And I will make... Notice all of these I will. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and I will make your name great. And so, you shall be a blessing.
Because this is my promise to you, Abraham. It will be fulfilled in your life. It's guaranteed. I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you, I will curse.
Now, folks, do you see in verse 3 there the promise that I will protect you? What if he held on to that before he threw Sarah under the bus on two different occasions and gave her to another man?
[14:38] Abraham, I will protect you. I'll curse those who curse you. And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Guaranteed. Put it in the bank. Now, verse 4. So, Abraham went forth as the Lord had spoken. So, he starts off obeying the Lord. This is his salvation, folks.
This is when God began to deal with him. And Lot went with him. Now, Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. How old is he now in our current text?
100. So, that's 25 years. A quarter of a century has gone by in his life. Now, I want you to look again at verse 1 there in chapter 12. Do you see separation there?
You should. He's being commanded to separate, isn't he, from his old life. He's being commanded to leave his old town, his hometown, and travel way, way far away into the unknown.
[15:41] He's never been up there before that we know of. You see separation. Now, to follow God, Abraham has to do as God directs. Now, we're not given all the details, but those things are going to be filled in in the subsequent chapters.

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In verses 2 and 3, you see the heart of God's promise to him. And notice what it contains there. Then in verse 4, we see Abraham obeying the Lord in this very high-cost command on his life. This is a high-cost command. Now, again, that was 25 years ago. And contained in God's command and in Abraham's obedience are many future years of uncertainty.
So, while God gives Abraham this command to uproot from his hometown and move to Haran and then from Haran to travel into the land of Canaan and sojourn there as a nomad, as a shepherd, as all of that command comes, realize, folks, that God's not filling in the details.
There's a lot of uncertainty in his future. There's going to be doubt and sin in his future. There's going to be fear and failure in Abraham and Sarah's future.
[17:00] There's going to be much hardship. God is sending him into a difficult life. But there's also going to be joy and victory and love and beauty and life.

God is calling Abraham to life. Life with God. He is saying to Abraham, the God who is is with you. And that is what you have today. The God who is is with you. And he'll never leave you nor forsake you.
Now, can you hold on to that with me? And can you rejoice with me through this message? That you currently have the God of the universe living in you.
He owns you. He loves you. And he desires to take you through these ups and downs and peaks and valleys of life.
[18:07] Now, folks, stay with me on this. I want you to be very well prepared for what's about to come. Commentator James Dixon had some keen insight about some subtle realities that are contained within God's promise to Abraham here as it's expressed in Genesis chapter 12.

Some subtleties which Abraham himself did not hear and could not know. You see, it's the same thing now. I'll come back to the quote in just a second.
As when God saved you, when God brought you to himself in repentant faith, God didn't spell out everything he had for you in detail that would be coming as a result of you becoming a Christian, did he?
He didn't tell you. Why? Because you probably would have keeled over from a heart attack or something, right? No, that's unfolding as you go. But in that time of God saving you, there were many subtleties you couldn't hear in that call to salvation or know.
But God knew and still knows and he knew he would work them out in your life. And there's still more to come as long as you are breathing his air on this side of heaven. Same thing with Abraham.
[19:25] And now Dixon, the commentator I'm quoting, is going to say something about those subtleties. Listen to this. I'll put it up on the screen. I promise, he's saying, he's paraphrasing God here, I promise, God says, to show you, Abraham, the working out of my power in your life so that there will be no mistake that I did it.

I want the world to know, your world, your sphere, the people that rub elbows with you. I want those people to know who I am in your life and I don't want any mistake about the fact that I'm making the difference in you.
I'm the difference. Now here's the question. If you claim to know Jesus, here's the question. Is it clear to them that Jesus is the difference in your life?
Because it ought to be. I don't mind if people get a little uncomfortable when the preacher comes over for whatever. I have many unsaved neighbors all around me and I go to their stuff and we get invited and it just thrills my heart that they invite us because they're going to be drinking and stuff like that and you know, the more they drink the more loose they become and you know, come up and arm around hey preacher so and all these expletives come out you know and I just but you know, you know, now don't see me being proud about that.
I'm thankful for that but as they express certain discomfort with me in those situations that's okay. I want them to know there's a difference.
[21:10] It's not a haughty difference. It's an uncompromising difference and that's what makes them uncomfortable. Let your hair down here. No thanks.

I'm good. What were you saying about Dallas and San Francisco the other day when they played? Tell me more about that or you know, whatever. we went to one of these events not too long ago and it was wonderful that we were able to be there several hours and when we came home Suzanne beat me to the punch and made the comment she said, Jeff, did you notice that not a

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single person a single time in an almost three and a half four hour time period asked us one thing about ourselves or our life or anything that was going on all they did was talk about themselves. Now one of the reasons they did that was because we kept them talking about themselves. We asked lots of questions to draw them out and keep them telling us things about their life. Unbelief is very self-centered.
It's what God has to fight against to bring us to himself and you know what? It took Jesus dying on the cross to do it. That's how powerful it is inside of you and inside of me.
As Abraham faces all of this God says to him in effect I promise to show you the working out of my power in your life so that there will be no mistake that I did it.
[22:44] Does the world around you see clearly that Jesus is the difference in you? Friends, that's what we're called to live by. It's a life of trusting obedience.

It's a life of willing repentance. It's not a burden for us to repent of our sins. It's joyful thankfulness brimming over in our lives so that even something as mundane as cutting the grass is an act of worship to God.
Why? Because it's His grass. grass. It's His grass. It's His stuff. I'm just trying to take care of it the best I can.
God. We live in genuine humility as God's servants because we are constantly why me Lord? Why me? Thank you Lord. It's a life of being useful in God's hands to showcase His love, His glory, His power at work in a human soul.
[23:52] God at work in a human soul. Folks, grab it! We just can't afford to let ourselves drift into the apathy, the spiritual apathy of the everyday so that we lose sight of who we are in Jesus Christ.

We stand head and shoulders above the issues of the world, not in conceit, but in genuine humility that God would choose me and give me the capacity to live a life that counts for heaven.
What a privilege, what a joy, what an opportunity that my life counts to God. The only explanation then for a life like that, the best explanation for you and your life is this, I'll throw it up here on the screen, God is doing it.
It is God who's making this life in me. Now, Dixon goes on to add this, and this is something very insightful, I thought, very wise, we need to hold on to this because many of us are living this right now or have lived it recently.
Listen to what he says here. This is the painful part of loving God. Did you know there was a painful part to loving God? I want my love to present me with pleasant moments, with good feelings, and a sense of security.
[25:24] I do not want my love to present me with questions, with testing, and with insecurity. Why does God's love inflict us with such pain?

Have you ever thought about that? Isn't that what the psalmist said in Psalm 73? God, it's hard to follow you. It's painful.
He's not whining. He's stating the truth. And this is exactly where Dixon is in this insightful comment. God is taking me in His love through difficult moments to fire my faith, to refine it, and grow it, and make it more pure.
But me, I want my love to be full of pleasant moments, good feelings, and a sense of security. I don't want my love to present me with the issues, hardships of life, the sting of conviction, the awareness that God is opening my eyes to a deep-seated pride, and greed, and selfishness, and conceit in my life.
Ugh! Even in the great joy of Isaac's birth, Abraham is faced again with pain in his love for God.
[26:49] Pain in his love for Ishmael and for Sarah. Now, friends, the Bible teaches that love can be very painful. We tend to associate pain with something bad or wrong, but we experience pain in love.

love. You with me? Aren't you glad the Bible is deeper than we are, wiser than we are, and forces us to think about things deeply and not on the surface?
Love can be very painful. Our passage can break down into what I'm going to call three sections. If you want a fancier word, three pericopes, three sections highlighting God's blessings and Abraham's responses of worship and obedience.
And this is kind of refreshing for us after we've seen what's happened with Sodom and Gomorrah and then coming through Abraham's failure in chapter 20. Now, we get to see some different things going on here as God is refining his faith and that faith is proving fruitful in Abraham's life.

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So, these are the three that I mentioned before worded just a little bit differently. We're talking about Abraham's worship of God and Isaac's birth. That's the first seven or eight verses or so.
[28:07] Then we have Abraham's worship of God separating from Ishmael in the next section. The final section for next week, Abraham's worship of God in his covenant with Abimelech.

We're going to take the first two this morning and so we'll catapult right into Abraham's worship of God in Isaac's birth, 1 through 8. So, I'm back in chapter 21.
Then the Lord took note of Sarah as he had said and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Let's just stop there and deal with what we're talking about here.
While this is the happy and joyous occasion in Abraham and Sarah's life as I mentioned before because the promised heir has finally arrived, there's some things going on here that the author wants us to focus on.
It's the culmination of God's protection of his promise from 25 years ago. From all the threats that the previous chapters have introduced.
[29:12] Is Abraham going to blow it and now God's promise is done because of Abraham's sinful selfishness and conceit and ignorance? Remember, it's been 25 years in the making of the fulfillment of this promise.

One quarter of a century that these two people have been growing older and older and older and further away from any human possibility that the two of them can come together and produce a child.
But what did God say? Is anything impossible for me? Right? That's where we live. We live there. Is anything impossible for me? No.
It isn't for God. Now verse 1 breaks down into what we have called before a chiasm. Notice what I put up here on the screen. A chiasm is a literary device to show emphasis in the text.
You and I don't write in chiasms. We could. We could learn to do this. But it was something that the Hebrews used quite often. So this is what it would look like then in verse 1 for the author to show the emphasis that he wants to put on what he's writing.
[30:21] A corresponds to A, B to B, and C to C. So at the beginning of the verse then the Lord took note. The next part that corresponds to A and the Lord said of Sarah for Sarah.

It's the part in the middle that I've highlighted that the chiasm is designed to emphasize. And so in Hebrew they would have been drawn to that emphasis immediately.
What's the emphasis that you see there? What is being most emphasized in verse 1? That God had said and God had promised. That's what you want to deal with as you start.
That's the foundation that you want to launch from for chapter 21. Is God doing all that he said he would do? Yes! The fulfillment is finally here.
It's kind of like what we celebrate when we think about all of the different prophecies about Messiah and now Messiah is here. God dwelling among us. We celebrate that in song, right?
[31:26] We do. Particularly around Christmas time. So then the Lord took note of Sarah as he had said. As he had promised for Sarah the Lord did.

That's the way it reads. So the emphasis is on God's word being spoken and then fulfilled just as God had said it would. It's both a declaration of what is true and good.
God has said this and so it's true and good. And it's a clear direction for us to live by what God says. God will always do as he's promised. Now folks God has made us many promises in the Lord Jesus Christ has he not?
Those are the promises we need to order our lives by. Do you know what they are? Do you even know? There are many of them. Notice a couple of things that Jesus himself said about this.
But Jesus answered and said it is written man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds from where? Out of the mouth of God himself.
[32:31] Your word the psalmist said is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Your word is. I have sworn and I will confirm it that I will keep your righteous ordinances.

So these are two declarations one from New and one from Old Testament literature speaking to us from scripture that we need to live by the word of the Lord. In verse two notice this.
So Sarah conceived as God had said and promised so it was done. Sarah conceived. She bore a son to Abraham.
Abraham and Sarah had this baby in their old age at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. Do you see that again? God had spoken.

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Throughout the text this is what we see. God acting. God doing. God prescribing. So we have infertile, barren, beyond menopause, Sarah at 90 years old and we have 100 year old Abraham and they had a baby.
[33:38] and the only reason that that took place was because God said. God said. Just as Ecclesiastes teaches us this came in verse two at God's appointed time.

It's why I took time to preach from Ecclesiastes before we launched into the rest of this. At God's appointed time. When the world would have absolutely no way to explain this birth, God does a true miracle of His grace.
And He did it in the lives of these two people. In their very bodies. Just as God had spoken and promised to Abraham 25 years ago. Friends, please, hear this now.
Please, in our life, in your life, in my life, don't push past God's obvious blessings in your life because you have become so absorbed with the things of the world, with your own agenda of self, with disappointment in your life.
Folks, there's always going to be temptation for disappointment in your life. Real disappointments, true disappointments, people letting you down and disappointing you, you disappointing yourself.
[34:52] It's real. There's always going to be temptation to anger because you're not getting your way because things aren't happening the way you think they should happen in the time frame they should happen, etc, etc.

And so you become angry. There's always temptation for bitterness and resentment and greed and pride and the like. And unfortunately, we allow those very things as we put our eyes on the things of earth to cause us to push past every day the obvious blessings that God is the difference in my life.
And we rob God of the worship He deserves in those moments. How dare we? How dare we? God of God of God of God of God of God of God of grace and say, God help me in my weakness.
Help me to offer you the worship of my heart and make it about you and less about me. Well, this is certainly what we've seen in Abraham's life.
He's made it about him plenty of times. Don't blow past, don't push past the blessings of God. Did you get up today? Are you breathing His air?
[36:03] Is your heart beating to give you life and opportunity? That's a blessing before anything else happens. Are you able to go in and have running water? Did you get out of a comfortable bed for the most part?

Do you have people in your life that you can invest in and serve and let God use you to help them be drawn near to Jesus? He's saying, Jeff, that doesn't sound like a lot about me.
Well, there you go. Do you have opportunity to serve other people that God would use your life to help them grow nearer to Jesus? Is that opportunity? Yes.
Does that matter? Absolutely. Because now you're involved in the greater priorities of heaven. What about your kids? Look, all of us have to raise brats. Sorry, kids.
All right, fine. The fact that they're kids, does that have to rob you of the blessing that they are gifts from God? No. It doesn't have to. It can't if you let it.
[37:03] What about being married? Marriage is a gift from the Lord. What are you doing with it? Is marriage causing you to worship the Lord? Listen, let's dispel the mess that the world wants to put on us and Satan in our flesh.

There is not a perfect marriage sitting in this room starting with my own. God. The only way for my marriage to become perfect is for God to get me out of it.
Now, sober up and take a spiritual outlook on life and don't let the issues of everyday life rob you of the worship that you owe God for the gifts He gives you every single moment of every single day.
And then the best is yet to come because your heart will stop beating, your body will dissolve into dust in the earth, and your soul will be with Jesus in glory.
Win-win. I'll tell you where there is no win because I mentioned it to you last time. There is no win in sin. I don't care what your point is or what you want to try to accomplish.
[38:16] If you're trying to do it in sin, you're in the wrong direction. Now it's sad and even sinful when we allow the issues of life to rob us of the simple pleasures and joys of this life that God gifts us with because they come from the hand of the Lord.

The Bible says all blessings come from the hand of the Lord. Now what's the antidote to living like that? To living with the stuff of life just kind of erasing our joy in life?

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You want to know the antidote? Here it is. We gain clarity and godly perspective for daily worship when we live by the wisdom of God.
This is another way of saying what Ecclesiastes told us. I need to take on the perspective of God about everything in life. When I begin to see life the way God sees it, it will change the way that I live.
It will. It has to. As long as I'm adopting His wisdom, it ought to be seen out in my life. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the appointed time.
[39:22] Now you know what she could have done? You know what he could have done? It's about time. You've put us through 25 years of hell waiting on this kid.

And now I'm supposed to be happy about it? Woo! 25 years, God. Do you see us doing stuff like this? It is sick.
It's sick. Because it's self. This is a happy time and a joyous time.
And you know what? These two people are letting it be that. Abraham is not wallowing in the past. Remember what he just came off of, throwing his wife under the bus and giving her to another man. I don't see anything in this passage that's suggesting to me that either one of them are holding any grudges or bitterness against each other about all that failure. I think God made them deal with it.
[40:20] There was repentance in chapter 20. There's going to be some more in chapter 21. You'll see it next week. And I think these people are honestly rejoicing in God's blessing on their life and their marriage.

Look at Sarah in verse 6. Who would have thought? Who could have said? Who would have told me that God would make me laugh in my heart and bless me with a child at this time in my life? Who would have said to Abraham in verse 7, Sarah would be nursing her own baby that I share in with my own husband? Wow.
Look at verse 3. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Now notice whenever the scripture is repeating stuff, folks, zero in. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him.
This is the Lord saying, see I told you, I told you it would come from you too, not anybody else. I think this is a reminder of Genesis 16 in his life when he got Hagar to come in and bear the child.
[41:29] I'm going to help you out God. This is him saying, no I told you it would be Sarah all along Abraham. Sarah I told you your child would come from your own husband Abraham. That's verse 3.

Isaac's name, as you know, means laughter. So it reflects God's involvement in the details of their lives. That's what it means. It's showing that God is in the details.
How? Alright, listen, on one hand, it reminds them, his name laughter, reminds them of when Abraham laughed in honest bewilderment and when Sarah laughed in sinful doubt or unbelief at God's promise that God would bring an heir from their two bodies in the future.
I'm going to give you guys a son. You, Abraham, you, Sarah. Abraham laughed and went, whoa, really? Okay?
And Sarah laughed, yeah, right. God's doing it. On the other hand, this laughter reminded them of how believing, following, and trusting God brings laughter into our hearts.
[42:40] This isn't earthly laughter. This is a laughter that God wells up in our hearts that becomes the worship of our soul to a good and holy God. God is making them laugh.

And the whole household is laughing in celebration and worship of Almighty God. It's the laughter of thanksgiving and love for who God is and for what He does.
Now, in verses 4 and 5, we'll just say that this tells us of Abraham's response of worship and obedience. God had commanded him to offer circumcision, and so he is doing that.
It is a sign of the covenant that Abraham is under. Now, I don't have time to deal with all of this in terms of the Presbyterian view of how circumcision corresponds to baptism, so they baptize babies and all that.
That's not in this text. All this is saying is Abraham's being obedient to what God commanded him. Let's leave it right there. In verses 6 and 7, we see Sarah in her own way offering worship to God.
[43:42] Who would have thought? Who would have thought? Boy, what a God. This is Sarah. Boy, what a God we serve. Boy, was I silly to ever doubt Him. Look at what God is doing in my life.

It's amazing. And then verse 8 sums it up for us, doesn't it? The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. Now, verse 8 is the introduction for the next section.

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It sets the stage for what's about to happen, because it paints a picture that the Hebrews would have recognized immediately. This great feast and celebration is going on, and then something's going to happen to mar the whole situation.
If you think of a birthday party, or you've had some kind of family issue. Now, are you like me? Do you have family that when all of us get together, there's hugs and kisses and slobbering and stuff, but it doesn't take very long for the friction to start?
Am I the only one that has family like that? Okay. Well, that's exactly what's happening here. Hebrews aren't any different. It didn't take long, and it was very specific. So, the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.
[44:59] Most likely, Isaac was weaned, and this would have told the Hebrews that would have given them an age marker to understand what's about to happen. He was probably weaned at about three years old.

So, you're looking at what? We call that a toddler, right? A little three-year-old. Okay. This sets the stage for the difference in age between Isaac and Ishmael.
Now, we got a three-year-old. Ishmael was probably 15 or 16 at this time. He's an older teenager. So, we have the relational conflict which precipitated Abraham separating from Hagar and Ishmael. It is a picture of what will come as Israel goes into the promised land and has to deal with the unbelieving that are all around them, and in the future, as the Ishmaelites continue to provoke Israel, attack Israel, instigate toward Israel, and you sit back and you say, boy, Israel's not trying to pick this fight.
Why does everybody want to destroy it? Well, there you go. They're Ishmaelites. That's why. He will be a donkey of a man whose hand is set against everyone and their hand is set against him.
[46:19] So that's why we fly helicopters and do things that have to say, you guys better start playing nice. They'll never play nice.

We want to tell our wonderful president as we pray for him, sir, they will never play nice. All right, I'm not going to make political comments.
We'll move on. man, you cannot make a deal with these people, saith the Lord. So what are we dealing with then? We're dealing with what's about to happen in the life of these people as they gather together for this festival.
So this is all going on and everybody's happy, but now we have this second part introduced. This is Abraham's worship of God and separating from Ishmael. All I'm trying to show you is that Abraham has set his heart to worship the Lord in the fun and happy and joyous times.
He set his heart to worship the Lord in the hard times, especially in the hard times. That's verses 9 through 21. Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, while this little festival is going on, whom she had borne to Abraham mocking.
[47:32] Mocking. What is going on here? Well, Ishmael did a kid thing. Ishmael did a bully thing. He did a stepbrother thing.

He picked on little Isaac. Now the best word for what Ishmael did at the end of verse 9, because you might have a different word, is the word mocking.
It comes from the Hebrew word tzahak. Now listen to the way I say that. It's going to become important in just a moment. Tzahak. It means to laugh or to joke.
And in certain Hebrew grammatical forms, it can mean to be playful. There were several commentators that picked up on that reality and said all he was trying to do was just play with the little kid and maybe he got a little rough.
But it wasn't any big deal. Well, let me tell you something. It was a big deal to Sarah. In this particular grammatical form, this particular verb form, this means to have sport with, to toy with, and hence we would say to mock or to bully.
[48:44] He's bullying his little brother, his half brother. Now I want you to do this. Compare the sound of Ishmael's name. Remember Ishmael is not in the covenant.

So tzahak with the sound of Isaac's name. Itzahak. Itzahak. So we have tzahak and Itzahak.
It is a Hebrew wordplay with Ishmael's name taking the negative connotation and Isaac's name taking on the more positive meaning. So in these verb forms in Hebrew, again, we have to explain this because we don't read and understand ancient Hebrew.
Most of us don't anyway. So we see these things that they immediately recognized. and understood what was going on. A Hebrew wordplay. So here's what we have.

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Tzahak, Ishmael, bullied Itzahak. We would say Isak or Isaac. Tzahak bullied Itzahak and Mama Bear Sarah saw it.
[49:53] And that's the difference. that was enough for Sarah to run to Abraham and demand that Abraham drive them out of the household. She's like, we ain't having this.

What Sarah did was she perceived insightfully, this is the future of my son Isaac as he makes the inheritance in our family and we're not going to have anything or anyone threaten it.
It's that important. Sarah realized that. Sarah saw it. What's going on with Abraham? He's my son. Remember what did Abraham do when God came a few chapters ago and told him about Isaac coming and Ishmael?
He said, oh that Ishmael would stand before you and be your choice. And what did God say? Nope, ain't going to happen. I'm going to bring a baby. You're going to call him this and this is the way we're going to go.
See, that's daddy's heart. Because Ishmael is his son after all. But Sarah has to come and say no, no, no. I see bad things pretending here.
[51:03] And so we're not going to have that. It's very interesting. Look at verse 10. Therefore she said to Abraham, drive out strong, drive out, force out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.

Now, let's ask the fair question. Is Sarah showing weakness of character here? Yeah, I think so. She's not handling it in a gracious way at all. She's angry.
She's probably holding on to some resentfulness, some bitterness from chapter 16 and all that's been going on for the last four years or so with all this stuff. She's jealous toward Hagar.
She's jealous toward Ishmael. She sees Ishmael as a threat. So she's not making any secret of how she feels and she's not handling it in a gracious way. I'll give you that.
But here's the bigger question. What does God do with all this? What a family mess, right? So you're the counselor, you're sitting there, Sarah and Abraham come in, Hagar and Ishmael come in, they leave little Isaac at home, which is good, and now they're sitting in front of you and you're trying to help them work this out and reconcile it.
[52:13] What do you tell them? Well, what does God do with all of it? Well, here's the short answer. I'll put it on the screen. God starts this way, gentlemen. God guides Abraham in how to minister to his wife, Sarah.

Boom. That's where he starts. Abraham, your first order of business is to take care of your wife. Your wife is troubled in spirit.
She's fearful, she's anxious, she's worried, she's probably bitter and a little resentful, and you need to help her through this. Do you see that in the text?
Yeah. This is the counsel that he's going to give him. The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of Ishmael, his son. Verse 12, but God said to Abraham, do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid.
Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her. For through Isaac, your descendants shall be named. This is a big difference between God coming to him last time and saying, you listened to the voice of your wife, didn't you?
[53:21] She had a bad idea. This time, Sarah's spot on. She's showing the insight. And so God's going to deal with her heart in all of this, but he's saying Sarah's right, Abraham.

She's right. She may not be handling it well, but she's got a point. That's what God's going to do with it. Minister to your wife.
God tells Abraham how to do right by Hagar and Ishmael. He confronts Abraham in his grief about what God will have him do.
Now, regarding Hagar, you might say, you know, Jeff, it doesn't sound very right or fair about putting them out of the household and turning them out in the desert to die. My goodness. So, how do we reconcile all of this?
Well, the first thing we could say is this, God directed it. And everything God does is good and right. Remember Ecclesiastes? Everything God does is right and good.
[54:26] So, separating from Hagar and Ishmael in exactly the manner that God tells him to do is right and good. Don't get hung up on that. For Abraham, this is a very bitter situation.

And it says that he is, up here on the screen, greatly distressed. The primary root of the word distressed means to be or to do evil or to treat badly.

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That's the root meaning. But in this verb form, it means that he is having a very hard and deeply grievous time of it. It's having a real hard impact on him.
It pains his soul. Again, what am I saying to you? It's what I said earlier in my introduction. Listen, it's not always pleasant in the moment to obey the Lord. That doesn't mean it's wrong, folks. Because it's hard in the Christian life doesn't mean it's bad or wrong or outside the will of God. We have to do hard things all the time to be obedient to God.
[55:25] God. It is hard to swallow your pride. It is hard to forgive other people. It is hard to move past you.

That's why we need a Savior. Amen? We need a Savior to help us get over us. It's also often costly. Remember I told you earlier that God's call on Abraham's life was a high cost call. It was a high cost command. We get those sometimes from the Lord. He lets us know this is going to be a high cost. We don't know all the details. We just know, Lord, I signed up for whatever. Right? I signed up for whatever. Folks, listen.
It is especially hard to follow the Lord's wisdom when our hearts are torn, tired, and tortured with grief and heartache and fear and worry.
[56:28] But I can say this, in these moments of deep pain, grief, and heartache, it's especially important for us to listen to God and then to do as God directs us. So God now brings clarity, direction.

He brings hope. Abraham in verse 12, don't be distressed. Listen to what your wife's telling her. Your descendants are going to come from Isaac.
All of my purposes and blessings for my future people who will come to know me and live for me will come through Isaac. And of the son of the maid, I will make a nation also.
So now here's where he reassures him. Here's the guarantee that's going to make the pill go down a little better. He didn't have to tell him this, but he does. The son that you're worried about, Ishmael and Hagar, his mom, I'm going to make a nation of him also.
Because why? He's your descendant. So what did Abraham do in response? He rose early in the morning, he took bread, food, and water, and he gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder for her.
[57:35] So he walked up and he took the bread, whatever it was in, and he took the water in the skin and he hung them over her shoulder as he looked into her eyes. I think God's telling, this is the closeness and proximity.

Remember, this woman became his wife. There's a tender moment here, there's a tenderness, there's a compassion, there's a sense of ease translating between them.
He can look her in the eye, gentlemen, because God has given him the guarantee, I'm going to take care of her myself. And so he can do the manly thing without having to stare at the floor.
Can you imagine? I know I'm sending you to your death. Here, here's a little water and a little bread. When it runs out, good luck. And I can't even look you in the eye, I'm so ashamed. But he can do the manly thing.
Why? Because God has fellowshiped with him and given him the direction. And so he can look his wife in the eye and do the manly and the godly thing.
[58:35] This is where we get our confidence to lead our spouse, our wives. It's from our own walk and worship with the Lord. When you don't have that, you're all over the map. And your family is going to look like that.

Take a cue from Abraham and take this encouragement from Abraham. You can recover from hard wrongs in your life. Guys, repentance and worship and faith, looking to the Lord to lead you.
All right, again, I say Sarah didn't handle this with grace, but she was right to take issue with Ishmael. So Abraham had to leave these people behind.
He had to force them out. Ishmael had to go because he had no stake in God's promised inheritance. None. In fact, he's going to serve as an enemy.
And his people are going to serve as an enemy of the Lord. And Abraham brought all of that in. The legacy of Messiah will come through Isaac.
[59:41] And so in a way we can say that we are in Isaac. Not because we're Jews or Hebrews, but because we have faith in the promise of God.

What is Isaac going to bring in terms of the promise? Messiah. So we have that same faith. That's us. It has nothing to do with our nationality.

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It has everything to do with our heavenly calling. It was hard for Abraham, but he rose early. I think that's a way to say he did it. He acted faithfully.
He got up right away early in the morning and he took care of this. He didn't let any dust settle on it. He didn't let himself rock and roll through the night. Am I doing the right thing? This is what God said do.
I've got to do it. And he resolutely went for it. That's a man. That's faithfulness. He didn't have any details, but he knew God would preserve Hagar.
[60:40] Why? Because God said he would do it. Now I want to share a couple quotes with you real quickly here. Look at this. This is from Henry Morris offering us some wise counsel about the necessity of all of this separating and things that are happening in their lives.

Look at this. Sometimes, now think about this carefully with me, friends. Sometimes it is necessary for God's people, if they are truly going to be in the will of God, that is, be obedient, and to enjoy the fullness of God's blessing to separate completely from those who might be a source of friction and carnality, even though such separation will be difficult and will give others who don't understand the spiritual issues involved occasion to criticize and ridicule.
Have you ever been there? Have you ever had to pull back from relationships because it was the best thing to do in terms of removing the friction and carnality and constant temptation that it might present you?
or that it is presenting you? Only to realize that the people on the other end who are involved don't see it spiritually, never will, and it opens you up to criticism.
It opens you up to mocking, to misunderstanding. Here it is right here in the Bible, folks. You're not the first. For Abraham to follow God, that's exactly what he has to do.
[62:01] We need to judge wisely in these situations of life, and the Bible gives us sufficient wisdom to do that. In this biblical situation, there are deeper spiritual issues to consider, and to use as a guide for our life.

I want you to remember this as I put it up here on the screen. We live in a greater spiritual context in all of life. What do I mean by that? The greater spiritual context is the greater reality of Jesus living in you, and the priorities of heaven that you've been called to live out.
Unbelievers in the world don't understand any of that. They don't like it, and they rebel against it. They can't stand godly authority. We submit to godly authority. We humble ourselves to godly authority.
We are defined by the authority of God in our lives. Well, I got a little more here I want to do, but I'm going to stop there because I can bring this stuff back in.
I can pick up here with this separation idea. I want to do, it's too important for me to rush through it, and I'd be tempted to do that right now as I watch the clock. So let me say this to you as I pull it to an end.
[63:13] It is very tempting for you and I to be in these issues of life, these trials, these tribulations, the hardship, even living in the will of God. It can be very hard.

Right? We're being called to do something that takes the Spirit of God in us to pull off. If we could pull off doing for God on our own, we wouldn't need the cross or the Holy Spirit.
We need the Spirit of God to help us live a holy life. So it's not easy. It's the work of God in you to do it. And as God works that in your life, there will be plenty of people outside of your life who don't get you.
They don't understand you. What we want them to see is the constancy and consistency that Jesus Christ in us is the difference. They may not understand it. They may not appreciate it.
They may not want anything to do with it. But there it is. The best explanation for my life is Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen?
[64:19] That's what we want. That's what we need to be ministering and praying for in each other's lives. Will you join me in prayer? Father, as we bow our hearts still in need of expositing the rest of this chapter, this passage, still many truths and wonderful fruits to be gleaned and taken into our hearts.

Lord, we just trust you with what's been said today that you will help us to be doers of this word as we've heard it, that we will turn it into action, that we will be encouraged by it, to be shown that people long ago, way before us, written down in the Bible, have struggled with these same issues.

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People have had to make hard decisions and do hard things. God, it's true. The love of God is often painful because it takes us into areas of life that we would never have gone in apart from the Spirit's leading.
So help us to manage these things and steward them and navigate them to the glory of Jesus. Help us to do it in a way that offers blessing to those around us so that we're not grumpy and unforgiving and ungrateful because we've thrown so much of our eyes on the issues of the world that we have allowed ourselves no longer to see the blessings of you at work in our heart every day in the eyes of our children, in the eyes of our spouse, in the fact that we get to get up and breathe your air and have our being in Jesus Christ.
Lord, I pray that you'll help us to be happy with the simple pleasures of life, that you'll teach us the way of contentment. And as we do that, that we will bring much glory to Jesus even as we struggle together, forgive each other, walk in the walk of Jesus, loving and gentle and kind, help us to be these people so that people will see you in us and have to say in their heart of hearts, whether they admit it or not with their mouths, the only explanation for God for their life is God is doing it.
[66:38] We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

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