



THE BEGINNINGS!

The Book of Genesis

The ups and downs of faith!

Genesis 21:1-34

Message #23 of 50 – S923

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Sunday Morning Service

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The ups and downs of faith!

Genesis 21:1-34

Opening Comments

- Good morning – turn to **Genesis 21**
- Today we continue our journey through **Genesis: THE BEGINNINGS!**
- As a young adult I came to believe that I could do whatever I set my mind to
- This belief carried over into my life after I became a Christian
- I believed that I could be the best Christian this world has ever seen
- I imagined myself walking the path without stumbling
- I pictured myself getting better and better and achieving more and more for Christ
- Imagine my shock the first time my faith couldn't handle something in my life
- Eventually, I did learn a truth that is described to us in our text today
- And it is a truth that we all need to learn as we go through the ups and downs of faith
- Let's pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us to learn something new today
- **Pray**

Teaching

- **The ups and downs of faith!**
- In the last chapter Abraham shames himself when he doesn't trust God to protect him and lies to king Abimelech with the half-truth that Sarah is his sister
- Not a high point in Abraham's life
- That is very quickly replaced with a high point
- **Genesis 21:1-2**
- We are reminded three times in two verses that God is faithful

Deuteronomy 7:9

Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments...

- God's faithfulness is intertwined with His revealed Word
- If God has said something in His Word, His nature demands that He be faithful
- God told Abraham and Sarah that she would have a son
- Humanly, it was impossible – ninety years old, barren her whole adult life, and then went through menopause
- But God said it was going to happen – even said when it would happen
- They didn't have to understand, didn't even have to believe
- God said it, He was obligated to His nature to do it
- **Genesis 21:3-7**
- God told Abraham he was going to have a child in his old age – he laughed
- God said Sarah would be the mother of that child – she laughed
- God told Abraham to name the child Isaac = 'he laughs' or 'laughter'
- He would then forever remind them of God's faithfulness
- As an act of faithful obedience Abraham circumcises Isaac on the eighth day
- Everyone is happy about this joyous addition to the family and this glorious display of God's creative power
- Maybe not everyone was happy
- **Genesis 21:8-9**
- Children would be weaned at about the age of three
- It was cause for celebration – the beginning of independence
- 'son of Hagar' = Ishmael – not named in chapter 21 though referred to several times – he is not the focal point of the family
- And that is the problem
- Ishmael would be about 16 at this point
- Until Isaac came along, he was Abraham's only child – his oldest son
- Set to inherit everything that belonged to Abraham
- Problem was, he was the child of Abraham's flesh, but not of God's promise **Galatians 4:28-29**

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.

- It is not surprising that Ishmael would feel threatened by Isaac

- He was the child of Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maid, Isaac was from Sarah
- Sarah sees Ishmael scoffing, or mocking Isaac – not having it
- **Genesis 21:10-11**
- This is a very ungracious thing for Sarah to do
- Abraham is very displeased – Ishmael was his son – loved him
- Even if he was a bit of a wild one – still his son
- For the last three years Abraham had been living in an up season of his life
- God had kept His promise to give him a son through Sarah
- Now here they were celebrating his miraculous son and the family is in turmoil – just had Thanksgiving gathering – was there turmoil?
- What is Abraham to do? God intervenes
- **Genesis 21:12-13**
- The Lord tells Abraham to listen to his wife
- That is interesting because that was how they got into this mess

Genesis 16:2

So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.

- But God understands how Abraham feels and so He encourages Abraham by promising to take care of Ishmael and make him great
- Abraham went from celebrating Isaac to having to say goodbye to his son Ishmael
- From celebration to being greatly displeased – from high to low – from up to down
- Life is often like that – that surprised me as a newer Christian
- I expected life to get better and better – but then bad things happened
- Not any more than before I was saved – I just didn't expect that – I didn't understand it
- I can't help but wonder what Abraham was thinking
- Don't know what he was thinking, but we are told what he did
- **Genesis 21:14a**
- Try to imagine what this was like for Abraham
- He loads up his sixteen-year-old son with whatever he can carry and sends him away with Hagar

- Abraham is sending them out into a harsh world – to an uncertain future
- And he does it because God told him to – God said He would take care of them - Abraham’s faith is growing steadily
- Faith is trusting God when it is hard to do what He wants
- Maybe even breaks your heart
- Even when you are not certain of what is going to happen
- **Genesis 21:14b-16**
- Hagar finds herself in a desperate and hopeless situation
- Turn back to **Genesis 16**, Hagar was in a similar situation previously
- Right after she conceived Ishmael with Abraham, Sarah mistreated Hagar until she ran away
- **Genesis 16:4-14**
- Either she forgot what the Angel of the Lord told her, or she didn’t believe Him
- Turn back to **Genesis 21**
- So, here she sits waiting for her son to die – she probably expected to die also – but God had made her promises also
- **Genesis 21:17-18**
- God’s promises are not nullified by our unbelief
- I am so thankful that God isn’t sitting in heaven waiting to see if I will believe Him so that He can keep His promises
- The Lord gently rebukes Hagar for her unbelief
- For at least the last sixteen years she has lived in close proximity to Abraham and seen his faith
- Yet, in this moment of desperation she doesn’t call out to the Lord
- But, because He is faithful, He remembers her and His promises to her
- **Genesis 21:19-21**
- God was with Ishmael = He watched over Ishmael and blessed him
- Not because of faith – his or his mother’s
- But because of Abraham and his faith
- God blesses those who put their trust in Him
- And those blessings overflow into the lives of the people we care about
- Chapter 21 ends with another encounter with king Abimelech

- **Genesis 21:22-23**

- Three years earlier Abraham proved that he didn't trust God enough to tell people the truth about Sarah being his wife
- Even though this ruined Abraham's witness to Abimelech, God told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet of God
- Since then Abimelech has been watching Abraham and can see that God is with him
- So much so that he wants to make a covenant of peace with him
- Thinking – if God is on Abraham's side – I want to be on Abraham's side

- **Genesis 21:24-32**

- Water is important
- We are pretty spoiled because we almost always have immediate access to abundant clean water
- After Abimelech leaves – Abraham's life settles into a peaceful rhythm of raising his young son and worshipping God

- **Genesis 21:33-34**

- Abraham's life is an example of ups and downs, good times and hard times, trials and blessings, expressions of faith and mistakes of faithlessness
- The encouraging thing for all of us is that if Abraham had ups and downs, so will we
- Abraham's faith was not perfect, but it was being perfected
- With each up and down of his faith Abraham was being prepared for the greatest test of his faith – when God asks him to sacrifice Isaac
- I thought my life with Christ was going to be a constant growth of righteousness, blessings, and holiness
- Little did I know that there would be moments of weakness when faced with temptation
- There would be trials that would cause me to question God's goodness or love
- There would be doubts, frustrations, anger, fear
- There would be choices and decisions I made without God
- And then there were glorious moments of faith
- Times when I could almost sense a tangible presence of God

- A study of Abraham's life shows that he wrestled with many of the same things
- And through it all his faith kept growing
- To the point that he could hear from God and respond immediately
- To do something that must have seemed unthinkable – impossible
- But his faith told him that not only was it possible – it was necessary
- God used all the ups and downs Abraham's life to grow his faith
- He is doing the same thing with me and you
- I have felt defeated many times since becoming a Christian when my faith wasn't strong enough
- I don't feel that way very often any more
- Not because my faith is perfect – far from it
- But because I know my faith is growing through the ups and downs
- God is using everything in my life to make me more like Jesus – even my mistakes
- As Christians, we never have to feel defeated **Romans 8:37-39**
Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Ups and downs are a regular part of the Christian life
- But they can only defeat you if you allow them to
- If you are in an up time of your life – rejoice and keep your eyes on Jesus
- If you are in a down time of life – repent and lift your eyes to Jesus
- You belong to God, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, you have His Word to guide you, and you are being made into the image of Jesus Christ
- Abraham's ups and downs didn't define him, but he allowed God to use them to refine him
- The ups and downs of your life will define you or they will refine you – the choice is yours
- Let's pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help refine us to be like Christ
- **Pray!**