

First Things – Genesis
Genesis 16
“A Sinful Shortcut”

1. HOW SIN DOUBTS THE GOODNESS OF GOD

- A. It questions His activity
- B. It questions His authority
- C. It questions His ability

2. HOW SIN DISHONORS THE GLORY OF GOD

- A. The arrogance of Hagar
- B. The actions of Sarai
- C. The attitude of Abram

3. HOW SIN DISPLAYS THE GRACE OF GOD

- A. His appearance to Hagar
- B. His assurance of Hagar
- C. His acclaim from Hagar

1. When my wife and I first started dating, she had a car and I did not. That meant that she was usually the one doing the driving.

2. Many times on our way to wherever we were going, Angel would say, “I know a shortcut,” and she would turn off on some back road detour, which usually ended up taking much longer than the regular route.

3. Before long I began to call those detours “long cuts” rather than “short cuts,” but Angel still defended her navigation skills.

4. In Genesis chapter 16, we find Abram and Sarai taking a sinful shortcut in their desire to have the family that God had promised to them.

5. The contrast between chapters 15 and 16 could not be starker. A.W. Pink describes it this way:

“In Genesis 15 Abram is seen as the man of faith, in chapter 16 as the man of unbelief. In Genesis 15 he ‘believed in the Lord,’ in Genesis 16 he ‘hearkened unto the voice of Sarai.’ There he walks after the Spirit, here he acts in the energy of the flesh. Sad inconsistency!”ⁱ

6. In this chapter we are reminded again of how quickly the faithful can fail and fall. We are also taught here that sin is never a shortcut to blessings.

7. Whenever sin becomes a part of the strategy of our lives, our plans never work out quite as we imagined they would. Sin *appeals* in the beginning but *appalls* in the end.

8. As God's people today, and the descendents of Abraham by faith, we must learn from this text about the impact that sinful shortcuts have on our relationship with the Lord.

9. Looking at this chapter, notice with me first of all:

I. HOW SIN DOUBTS THE GOODNESS OF GOD

1. Romans 14:23 says, "...*whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" There is a sense in which before we ever disobey God, we must first doubt Him.

2. That is the case with the sin in our text. The chapter opens by telling us what we already know; "*Now Sarai Abram's wife bore him no children...*"

3. Even though God had promised Abram descendants that would equal the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore, at this time, after some ten years in Canaan, the patriarch and his wife were still childless.

4. Doubting whether they would ever have a child together, Sarai hatches a plan for Abram to marry her servant Hagar, and use her as a sort of surrogate mother.

5. The plan is a scandalous one, especially to our modern ears, but the sin at the heart of it is nothing more than doubt and unbelief.

6. Consider how this plan was a clear sign of doubt towards God. Consider how:

A. It questioned His activity

1. Note carefully Sarai's words in verse 2. It says, "*And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing...*" In the *ESV*, Sarai says that the Lord "prevented" her from having children.

2. There is a sort of jab at God in that statement. Sarai was blaming her barrenness on the work of God.

3. To some degree, that *was* the case. God was not going to give Sarai and Abram a child until they were both well beyond the point of having one apart from His grace and power.

4. Her barrenness *was* a part of the plan of God, but it was a part that Sarai now questioned, and sought to work around by her little surrogate scheme.

5. There are times when we are tempted to question God's activity in our lives. We sometimes question the wisdom or the goodness of what God is doing with us.

6. Yet in those times we must be mindful that God knows better than we do. His plans are right, even when they do not seem to be in our eyes.

7. In Romans 11:33, Paul says, "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*"

8. This plan was a sign of doubt toward God, not only because it questioned His activity, but notice further that:

B. It questioned His authority

1. Notice with me Abram's response to this little indecent proposal from his wife. The close of verse two says, "*...And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.*"

2. The same man who had bravely stood against the five kings to rescue Lot cowers like a child before the wishes of his wife.

3. In the previous chapter God had given Abram His word and sealed it with a symbolic covenant. *God* was the one who would give Abram the promised seed.

4. Yet Abram's compliance with this plan was an act of rebellion against the authority of God. In submitting to Sarai and this sin, Abram was working outside the will of God.

5. In truth, all sin is a revolt against the authority of God. All sin, no matter how small or significant, is treason against the Lord.

6. Someone once said, "We never see sin aright until we see it as against God...All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His Law that is broken, His authority that is despised, and His government that is set at naught."ⁱⁱ

7. This plan was hatched from unbelief in God. It questioned His activity, and His authority. Notice also that:

C. It questioned His ability

1. Though they do not say it expressly, the primary reason for this whole sinful shortcut is because Abram and Sarai are not sure that God can do what He said He would do.

2. Sarah was 75 years-old, and Abram was even older. In her mind, there was no way that the promised seed could come through their union.

3. This whole episode is a clear picture of unbelief. It is two people saying by their actions, "Lord, we don't think you can handle this. We will take care of it ourselves."

4. How often do we as God's people resort to scheming and scrambling in our own abilities simply because we do not really believe that God can or will handle it?
5. Rather than waiting on the Lord, we try to work it out without Him, and we end up doing something outside of His will as a result of it.
6. God builds with eternal brick and stone, but when we doubt His construction abilities, we resort to our own sand castles that the tide of time proves to be insufficient.
7. In this passage, we are pointed to *how sin doubts the goodness of God*. Notice secondly that we see here also:

II. HOW SIN DISHONORS THE GLORY OF GOD

1. After Abram and Hagar were married, verse 4 says, "*And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived...*" Maybe Sarai's plan had worked after all.
2. The truth is, however, though a baby was on the way, the whole scene only got uglier as the pregnancy progressed.
3. R. Kent Hughes says, "The result was the first marital triangle in biblical history...[and] the multiplication of rejection, anger, hurt, jealousy, and vicious cruelty."ⁱⁱⁱ
4. What is most disturbing about all this is that these are supposed to be God's people! He had chosen them and called them to Himself, and yet they are acting nothing like the glorious God to whom they belonged.
5. When we as the redeemed people of God sin, we distort and dishonor the glory of the Lord who has saved us from our sins.
6. Consider some of the things that brought dishonor to God in this text. First of all, He was dishonored by:

A. The arrogance of Hagar

1. In verse 4, the text says of Hagar, "*...and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.*"
2. Literally, when Hagar knew she was pregnant with Abram's child, she began to look down on Sarai. She became cocky and arrogant around the camp where she had once only been a servant.

3. Every time she got around Sarai she would begin to rub her growing belly, and smirk at the wrinkled, old, childless woman.

4. In Proverbs 6:17, among the things that God hates the first is “a proud look.” God despises pride as much as any sin that we can commit.

5. Someone has wisely said that pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick except the person who has it. No doubt this pride made Sarai sick, but more than that, it dishonored the glory of God.

6. He was dishonored by the arrogance of Hagar, and notice further that He was also dishonored by:

B. The actions of Sarai

1. In this text Sarai behaves both like a big baby and a brutal bully. In verse 5 she fusses at Abram saying, *“My wrong be upon thee...”* She said, “This is all *your* fault!”

2. How often is it that when our sin comes back to haunt us we try to find someone else to blame for it?

3. Verse 6 says that Sarai “dealt hardly” with Hagar. The phrase is translated from a word that is later used to describe the cruel treatment that the Israelites received from their Egyptian taskmasters.

4. Sarai had wanted Hagar to be a surrogate, but now she treats her like a slave. She is vindictive, violent, and venomous.

5. This is a woman who is praised in the New Testament for her faith and for her obedience to God. Yet here, her behavior is nothing but a shame to her God.

6. Unfortunately, I have seen people who claim to know the mercy and grace of God for themselves, but show none of it to those they feel have wronged them.

7. In this text, God is dishonored by the arrogance of Hagar, and the actions of Sarai. I would add further, He is dishonored by:

C. The attitude of Abram

1. When Sarai complains to Abram about the behavior of Hagar, verse 6 says, *“But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee.”*

2. One writer says of this scene, and specifically of Abram, "...there was not an honorable character in the lot. All were ignoble. Abram was the worst. He was pathetic, passive...and uncaring of either woman."^{iv}
3. Abram is supposed to be a mighty man of faith, but he is awfully weak in this story, and displays an attitude of apathy toward Hagar that is sad and cruel.
4. Notice he calls her, "your maid." He fails to remember that she is also now his wife.
5. At the close of this chapter, Hagar refers to God as "the God who sees." We can only wonder how His heart was grieved as He saw this sinful mess in the household of Abram.
6. As we read over this ancient soap opera-like story, it ought to challenge us to live in such a way that we bring no dishonor to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord!
7. Every action of our lives ought to be filtered through a single defining question, "Will this glorify God?" When we sin, we forget His glory, and we dishonor our glorious Savior.
8. Looking back at this text, we see here not only *how sin doubts the goodness of God*, and *how sin dishonors the glory of God*, but we see also lastly:

III. HOW SIN DISPLAYS THE GRACE OF GOD

1. In Romans 5:20, Paul said, "...*where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.*" That is certainly true of the story in Genesis 16.
2. The ugliness of this whole episode only serves to highlight the graciousness of God toward those who had sinned.
3. Like Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, every one of us have done things that are sinful and foolish, but thankfully we serve a God who is gracious and forgiving!
4. Notice how the grace of God is seen in the midst of this sin-filled chapter. First of all, it is seen in:

A. His appearance to Hagar

1. Chased off by Sarai's cruel treatment, the Bible tells us that pregnant Hagar ran off into the wilderness.

2. Verse 7 says, "And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness..." The Lord came and found this slave girl who had been forced from her home.
3. Consider the grace of this appearance to Hagar. She was not a part of the promised blessings to Abram. She was an Egyptian, an outsider to the covenant that God had made with His chosen servant.
4. Nevertheless, God in grace went to her and spoke to her and intervened in her life!
5. I am reminded here that when I was an outcast and an alien from the family of God, born in sin and without any hope or heavenly home, God sent His Son to come to me and call me to Himself!
6. He found me in my sinful wanderings, called me by name, and pointed me back to where I needed to be!

*In loving kindness Jesus came,
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame,
By grace He lifted me!*

7. We see the grace of God against the backdrop of sin not only in His appearance to Hagar, but we see it also in:

B. His assurance of Hagar

1. The Lord told Hagar to return back to Abram and Sarai, which must have seemed like a frightful instruction. However the Lord assured Hagar of her future.
2. In verse 10, the angel of the Lord said to her, "...I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude."
3. In verse 11 he added, "Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction."
4. The name, Ishmael literally means, "the Lord has heard." He knew the pain in this girl's heart, He heard her cries, and He assured her that she and her son would be alright.
5. Like Hagar, we as sinners have every reason to fear what might lie ahead of us. The Law of God condemns our sins, and declares our guilt.

6. But in the cross of Jesus Christ, God speaks peace to our hearts! He tells us that we are forgiven, and turns us from the path of hell toward a future in heaven!

7. In one of my favorite quotes, A. B. Simpson says that the gospel, "Tells rebellious men that God is reconciled, that justice is satisfied, that sin has been atoned for, that the judgment of the guilty may be revoked, the condemnation of the sinner cancelled, the curse of the Law blotted out, the gates of hell closed, the portals of heaven opened wide, the power of sin subdued, the guilty conscience healed, the broken heart comforted, the sorrow and misery of the Fall undone."

8. The grace of God assures us of the hope we have in Jesus Christ in spite of the sin that condemns us!

9. God's grace is seen not only in His appearance to Hagar, and His assurance of Hagar, but it is also seen in:

C. His acclaim from Hagar

1. Notice verse 13. It says, *"And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?"*

2. Verse 14 says that she also gave a name to the well of water where the Lord had appeared to her. She called it, "Beerlahairoi". The name literally means, "A Well of the Living One Who Sees Me"^v.

3. Hagar realized that though she was just a pregnant slave girl, and though she had been run off from her master's house, she was still within the view of the God of Heaven.

4. Her acclaim and praise of God remind us that no matter what we've done, how far we have gone, or where we are, we are still within the gracious view of God!

5. Sin separates us from God, but it does not hide us from Him, nor keep Him from finding us and giving us forgiveness and grace!

6. A little child cried for her mother in the darkness of the night. Her mother told her not to fear, that God was with her.

7. The little girl said, "Well I can't see Him in the dark!" Her mother said, "No, honey, but He can still see you!"

8. The grace of God is such that even when we walk in the darkness of sin, God can still see us with eyes of grace!

1. Though God is gracious in this story, His grace does not erase the consequences of Abram and Sarai's sin.
2. In verse 12, the angel of the Lord prophesied about Ishmael, Hagar's son, saying, *"And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."*
3. Even today, Ishmael's descendents raise their hand against everyone around them, as the continuous ruckus of the Middle East reveals.
4. When Abram and Sarai finally did have their promised son, Ishmael and Hagar proved to be a thorn in their family's side.
5. We are reminded in this chapter that it is better to wait on the Lord and to live by faith than to try any shortcuts of sin.
6. In the end, the Lord will be gracious to us, even when we fail, but the fallout of our failures will haunt us, and maybe even outlive us.
7. Let us learn from this chapter, and heed the warning of Ephesians 5:17, *"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."*

ⁱ Pink, A.W., Gleanings in Genesis, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1976), p. 173

ⁱⁱ Plumer, W.S., "Sin", www.sermonillustrations.com, accessed 6/2/11,
<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/sin.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 237

^{iv} Hughes, R. Kent, p. 241

^v HCSB