

*First Things – Genesis*

**Genesis 21:1-13**

**“The Longer You Serve Him”**

1. **YOU WILL BE ASSURED OF HIS WORD TO YOU**
  - A. The truth of His promises will be realized
  - B. The timing of His provision will be right
2. **YOU WILL BE AMAZED AT HIS WORK IN YOU**
  - A. It will be a source of gladness to you
  - B. It will be a story of grace for you
3. **YOU WILL BE ALIGNED WITH HIS WILL FOR YOU**
  - A. It is a sometimes painful process
  - B. It is a spiritually profitable process

1. The early church father, Polycarp, was the Bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of the Apostle John. He was martyred in 155 A.D.
2. On the day of his death, the magistrate pushed him to renounce his faith saying, “Swear the oath, and I will release thee; revile the Christ!”
3. Polycarp answered, “[86 years] have I been his servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”
4. More recently, the songwriter expressed a similar sentiment when he said, “The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows.”
5. By the time we come to Genesis 21, the patriarch, Abraham, had been following the Lord for well over 25 years.
6. While there was still a way to go in his earthly sojourn, this chapter marks a sort of culmination in his spiritual journey as the Lord fulfilled the long awaited promise in the birth of his son, Isaac.
7. In the text before us I think we see some reminders of the kinds of things we find as we follow the Lord through the years of our lives.
8. The longer you walk with Jesus, the more you will learn about who He is, and what it means to serve Him and belong to Him.
9. Let’s examine this important chapter in Abraham’s scriptural story, and I want to point you to what you can expect to find as you follow the Lord in this life.
10. First of all, the longer you serve Him, at some point:

## **I. YOU WILL BE ASSURED OF HIS WORD TO YOU**

1. Chapter 21 opens with the record of something we have been anticipating for a while as we've read through Genesis.
2. Verses 1 and 2 record, "*And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.*"
3. For years now, Abraham had followed God on the fuel of faith, believing the original promises that God had made to him when he first left Ur.
4. Now, at 100 years old, faith became sight, and Abraham held in his arms what he had hoped for in his heart. Likewise, when we take God at His word, He is pleased at times to prove to us that our faith is not in vain.
5. Look at the text and consider with me how God assures us as His people. First of all, we see here that:

### **A. The truth of His promises will be realized**

1. As the Holy Spirit records for us the story of Isaac's birth, special emphasis is placed upon what God had said in his promises to Abraham and Sarah.
2. Look again at verse one. It says, "*And the LORD visited Sarah **as he had said**, and the LORD did unto Sarah **as he had spoken.***" (emphasis mine)
3. The Lord did just as He had said He would. His promises became realities in the lives of His servants.
4. Up until this time, Isaac had been only a word from God, a promise that was yet to be fulfilled. But now, the promise was there in flesh and blood, nursing at Sarah's breast.
6. John Calvin said of this text, "...[God] never feeds men with empty promises..."<sup>i</sup>
7. As we follow Him in faith, there will come a time when His promises will take on flesh and blood, and become realities in our lives.
8. Think about it! For centuries, the promise of the Messiah hung over the world like an ancient tale. But the day came when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us", and God's people saw the promise become a reality!
9. Abraham's story reminds us that if you walk with the Lord long enough, you'll see some "Isaacs" in person. You will see promises become realities.

10. We will be assured of God's word to us, not only because the truth of His promises will be realized, but notice also that there is assurance in the fact that:

### **B. The timing of His provision will be right**

1. Look at verse 2. It says, "*For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.*"

2. Though many years had passed since the original promise of a seed and son was given to Abraham, Isaac was by no means late in his arrival.

3. He came according to the "set time" that God had planned and promised.

4. The old writer, A.W. Pink said, "...God is in no hurry in the working out of His plans. Man may fret and fume, hurry and bustle, but Jehovah has all eternity at His disposal..."<sup>ii</sup>

5. Though Abraham and Sarah might have wanted Isaac before he came, he arrived exactly when God said He would, and precisely when he needed to.

6. If you walk with the Lord long enough, you will learn that while He does not always move at your *preferred* pace, He always moves at a *precise* pace; one that is for our own good and His eternal glory.

7. God doesn't need to consult the calendar; He controls it. *Over* time, we are assured that He is always *on* time.

8. R. Kent Hughes said, "The birth of Isaac was a precise, empirical validation of God's promise. A ninety year-old mother...and her baby boy bore proud evidence."<sup>iii</sup>

9. The longer you serve the Lord, the more you will become convinced that what He says, He will certainly do. He will prove Himself faithful in your life!

10. Looking again at this text, we see that as you walk with the Lord through the years, not only will you be *assured of His word to you*, but notice secondly that:

## **II. YOU WILL BE AMAZED AT HIS WORK IN YOU**

1. Back in chapter 18, the Lord had promised that this birth was going to happen, but Sarah had originally laughed at the thought of it.

2. But God asked her the question, "*Is any thing too hard (literally 'too wonderful') for the LORD?*" (18:14)

3. In our text in chapter 21, we find Sarah in wonder at the wonderful thing God had done for her. In verse 7 she said, "Who would have ever said to Abraham that I would nurse his child? But I have given him a son in his old age."

4. She was amazed at what the Lord had done. Likewise, if we walk with God long enough, we will be able to look back in wonder at the work He has done in us.

5. We will be able to look at our lives and say with Psalm 118:23, "*This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.*"

6. Consider what the wonderful work of the Lord in our lives will mean to us as we walk with Him. First of all, we see from our text that:

**A. It will be a source of gladness to you**

1. Our text records what appears to be a little song that Sarah sang when she held her newborn son. Verse 6 says, "*And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.*"

2. One writer says, "There was laughter everywhere. The old man and his wife laughed, and continued to laugh as they held tiny Laughter in their arms. Baby Isaac cooed and laughed. The camp chuckled out loud. Heaven smiled."<sup>iv</sup>

3. Though they had originally laughed in disbelief at the promise of Isaac's birth, now they laughed with delight at the pleasure of Isaac's birth.

4. What the Lord had done for them had brought them unbelievable joy! They were giddy and glad about what God had given them.

5. In Psalm 16:11, David said, "*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*"

6. The mark of true believer is not a scowl and a somber spirit. It is a smile and the laughter of true joy!

7. Those who know their sins have been forgiven, heaven is their home, and Jesus is their Lord are glad about it! *He* has made them glad!

8. A flag known as the Royal Standard flies over Buckingham Palace whenever the queen of England is present there. Walter B. Knight once said, "Joy is the flag that flies over the castle of our hearts announcing that the King is in residence today."<sup>v</sup>

9. The longer you serve Him, the more you will smile over the wonder of what He has done for you! His work in your life will be a source of gladness to you, but consider also that:

### **B. It will be a story of grace for you**

1. Look again at what Sarah said in verse 6. She said, "...*God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.*"

2. Sarah realized that the story of a 90 year-old mother would be a source of joy, not just to that mother, but to all those who would hear it.

3. Even now, we chuckle at the thought of a 100 year-old father and a 90 year-old mother. We imagine them struggling to walk right along with their toddler! We suppose that all three of them had nothing but gums to eat with!

4. The truth is, we read this story and we smile, knowing that nothing is too hard for the Lord! We realize His grace and His power in the lives of His people through the story of Abraham, Sarah, and baby Isaac.

5. In much the same way, as God does His work in us, bringing us through trials and into triumphs, bearing our burdens and pouring out His blessings, our lives are telling a story of grace for the world around us to read.

6. Someone once asked an elderly gentleman, "Sir, to what do you attribute your advanced age?" The man responded, "I suppose I must attribute it to the fact that I haven't died yet."

7. As we move through the years of our lives, we can attribute them all to the grace of God! Where we are and what we have are because of God's amazing grace.

8. There is a third lesson we draw from this text. The longer you serve the Lord, in time *you will be assured of His word to you, and you will be amazed at His work in you.* Lastly, I would add this:

### **III. YOU WILL BE ALIGNED WITH HIS WILL FOR YOU**

1. While there was much joy and laughter surrounding the birth of Isaac, not everybody was truly happy about his arrival.

2. Verse 8 of our text moves us forward a couple of years. It says, "*And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.*"

3. Verse 9 says, "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." The word translated "mocking" is the same word translated "laugh" in verse 6.

4. However, Ishmael's laughter was not one of joy, but one of derision. This angered mother Sarah, and led her to demand that Hagar and her son be cast out of the camp.

5. Though this was hard for Abraham to do, it turned out to be the will of God for his life.

6. We are reminded here that part of what God does in our lives as we walk with Him is to bring us closer to Himself and to His perfect will for us.

7. Consider this truth with me as we see it in our text. First of all, we recognize that when God aligns us with His will:

**A. It is a sometimes painful process**

1. In verse 10, angry and defensive, Sarah said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

2. Verse 11 says, "And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son."

3. Abraham loved Ishmael! Before Isaac's birth, he had pleaded with God to let the blessing and promise fall upon Ishmael.

4. Yet, in verse 12, we read, "And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

5. Though the Lord certainly did not condone Sarah's attitude, her argument was correct. Isaac was to be the heir.

6. At this point, the Lord's will for Abraham's life would require him to separate from something that He loved and cherished.

7. In much the same way, as we walk with the Lord and serve Him, there will be times when the Lord will require us to take steps that are not emotionally easy or personally pleasing.

8. Sometimes beloved things must be abandoned. Sometimes we have to walk away from dreams and desires we once held dear.

9. Just this past year, I watched my parents sell their home. I was raised in that house. My parents had lived there for 22 years. They loved their home.

10. Yet, the call of God to go to the Native Americans required them to leave it behind in order to go forward in His will.

11. As God aligns us with His plan for our lives, it is a sometimes painful process. However, we see in this text further that:

### **B. It is a spiritually profitable process**

1. Though Abraham was grieved at the thought of his son leaving, the Lord assured him saying, *"Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman...for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."*

2. He added this promise in verse 13, *"And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed."*

3. The old writer, Griffith Thomas, says of this text, "God was taking up the tangled threads of his servant's life, weaving them into His Own Divine pattern, and overruling everything for good."<sup>vi</sup>

4. The presence of Ishmael in the family was never a part of God's plan in the first place. Going forward, it would have been a major hindrance to all that God was going to do in Abraham, and in Isaac.

5. God was going to call Abraham to a higher level of faith using Isaac as part of the test. Ishmael might have changed how Abraham responded to that test.

6. In the end, we are reminded that God's way is best! He knows what we need and what we don't need.

7. Though at times His discipline in our lives is painful, and when He has to align us with His will, we sometimes resist it and grieve over it.

8. However, in the end we always see that being in the center of His will is far better than what we thought we wanted and needed.

9. The poet, John Oxenham expressed this thought in his poem, "God's Handwriting". He said:

*He writes with characters too grand,  
For our short sight to understand,  
We catch but broken strokes, and try,*

*To fathom all the mystery,  
Of withered hopes, of death, of life,  
The endless war, the useless strife,  
But there, with larger, clearer sight,  
We shall see this – His way was right<sup>vii</sup>*

1. In some twenty five years, the Lord transformed Abram the pagan into Abraham the patriarch.
2. In chapter 21, the 100 year-old servant of God held his newborn promised son, and realized that God had kept His word. He marveled at the work God had done, even as he realized more work was yet to come.
3. When we read this chapter, we are pointed to some wonderful truths for our own lives as believers. The longer we serve Him, the more we realize what a wonderful Lord we have.
4. In the birth of Isaac, the promised son, we are also pointed to the ultimate Promised Son, the Lord Jesus!
5. He is our Lord, and as we serve Him, we serve the same God as Abraham did. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
6. Just as Abraham did, let us serve Him all of our days until the day we see Him face to face and thank Him for all He has done in our lives!

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<sup>i</sup> Cavin, John, Commentary on Genesis – Vol. 1, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), *Amazon Kindle Edition*

<sup>ii</sup> Pink, A.W., Gleanings in Genesis, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1976), p. 208-209

<sup>iii</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 293

<sup>iv</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, p. 293 -294

<sup>v</sup> Swindoll, Charles, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, (Word Publishing, Nashville, 1998), p. 322

<sup>vi</sup> Thomas, Griffith, Genesis I-XXV: A devotional commentary, (The Religious Tract Society, London, 1907), p. 248

<sup>vii</sup> Oxenham, John, Bees in Amber, (1913), *Amazon Kindle Edition*