

GENESIS 21:1-14

THE PUTTING AWAY OF THE FLESH

Have you ever been forced to rid yourself of something that was a large part of your life? It could be an item such as a child's blanket or a bad habit. It could have been a particular food you loved because of health reasons. It could even be a job or a certain acquaintance, a certain relationship that was not good for you. At any rate, we have all been put in a situation where we had to get rid of something or someone that had been a large part of our lives. This is never easy. We are creatures of habit. We grow accustomed to the things and people that make up our daily lives. Even when we know it is for the best, or even if we know it is God's will that we part company it is still hard to do. Many women find it hard to do this even in abusive relationships.

Have you ever heard of Stockholm syndrome? This was first noticed when hostages were taken in Stockholm Sweden. After being captured and held against their will for a time the hostages began to feel a bond with their captors. In a very real way, they didn't want to be freed. This has been noticed many times in hostage situations since then.

The fact is that once we get accustomed to something or someone, even if they aren't what is best for us, we don't want to turn loose.

This is what Abraham is going through in the first half of Genesis 21. There is a lot of drama in the first half of this chapter. As we go through it try to put yourself in the place of Abraham, Sarah, Ishmael and Hagar. Human relationships are complicated. Many times the solutions to our

problems seem as though they are also complicated. In fact, the solutions are sometimes simple, but painful.

Abraham's entire household will be affected by what transpires in chapter 21. At least that is how Abraham and the rest of the family see it. However, God sees it in an entirely different light. He is looking at it from the eternal perspective. That is how we are to see things also.

So let's turn in our bibles to Genesis chapter 21 and begin with verse 1.

1 And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

In the first two verses we see that God is faithful to keep His promises. We need to really take that to heart. God is not a man that He should lie. We also see that God kept His promise according to His timetable. It has been said that God's time is always on time. We tend to want to rush things, especially when they are blessings for us. Keep in mind that God's plan has a far greater scope than just you and me. His plan encompasses all of humanity, all of the universe, and all of history as well as the future. We just happen to be one of the pieces that fit into the puzzle. We aren't random pieces. God numbers the hairs on our heads. He clothes the grass of the field and feeds the birds of the air. Jesus

made this point and then asked the disciples if they actually thought He would neglect them?

So once we receive a promise from God, we don't need to worry about the timing. It will be there when it is needed to accomplish the will of God. We just need to be patient and make sure that we are on the same page as God regarding His plan for our lives.

Abraham named the boy Isaac as God had told him to do and then circumcised him on the 8th day.

The 8th day represents the number of new beginnings in the Bible. The 8th day is the first day of the new week. God started the post-flood world with 8 people. It is also the day that the body begins to produce vitamin K and prothrombin, which are necessary for the clotting factor in our blood. Without it a baby could bleed to death.

6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

Hagar and Ishmael Depart

8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

Sarah's take on the whole laughing incident is a little different than how I read it. Her laugh was more like a scoff. When confronted by the Lord about it she denied laughing. I don't know if people were laughing with her or at her. However, with the birth of her long awaited child, she can definitely laugh with joy.

It is funny how time changes our view of some things. Perhaps the realization of God's promise has changed her perspective. At any rate, there should be a maturation process that takes place in all of us. Not only mentally, but spiritually also. Perhaps this is what happened to Sarah and has now allowed her to see the grace of God in that she was able to have a child, not just any child, but the promised one in her old age. When God waits to bless us there is always a good reason.

The day of Isaac's weaning was a festive one. Abraham threw a great feast. Not everyone was a happy camper though.

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."

The word scoffing here, or mocking in the KJV means to laugh in a sporting way. There were 14 years between Ishmael and Isaac. For all those years Ishmael was the only one, and then another baby came along that grabbed all the attention. We have seen this in many of our own families. Abraham had raised Ishmael for all those years. He had been along side his father as he tended the herds. He was going to inherit the Ponderosa, or so he thought.

At any rate, sending him away wasn't going to be an easy thing to do. There are many times when doing what God wants us to do is not easy. ***In fact most of the time it is hard because it is against our very nature to do the will of God.*** It is against societal norms in many cases.

As you can see, this perplexed Abraham. However, the feast has brought this to the surface and it is time to deal with it. Though Abraham didn't want to send the boy away God speaks to him and directs him.

12 But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. 13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.”

14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba.

Here God told him to listen to his wife. There have been other times that got people in trouble. This time it was the right thing to do. God has now told Abraham to hearken to his wife. Wisdom is **ALWAYS** referred to in the feminine gender. Women definitely have a different way of looking at things, and they are wiser in many ways. Wisdom is in the realm of the Ladies.

On the practical side, because of the promise and the purpose of Isaac there cannot be two bulls in the same pen. Satan would be glad to use this for another Cain and Abel scenario.

It is clear that Isaac is the one to whom the main blessing and promise is given. But God promises that Ishmael will be taken care of also, and it is stipulated that this is for Abraham's sake.

On the spiritual side of things, there is another lesson to learn. For this, we will have to refer to the NT and the Apostle Paul.

Gal. 4:21-26

21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Paul uses the two boys, Ishmael and Isaac, as well as their mothers as an analogy. Ishmael was born of a bondwoman and is called a child of the flesh. Isaac was born of a freewoman and is referred to as the child of promise. Ishmael represents the Law while Isaac represents grace through faith.

Paul makes the comparison to the Galatians asking them if they want to be free under grace or in bondage under the Law. He is asking them if they want religion or a relationship.

The purpose of the Law was to show us that we couldn't measure up to God's standard of holiness. Paul said it (the Law) was a schoolmaster. To get up every morning and attempt to keep the Law was an act of spiritual suicide. It was impossible. Furthermore, James said:

James 2:10

10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

The Jews never seemed to figure this out, and unfortunately there are some Christians that haven't either.

The Law can't be intermingled with grace. The two are diametrically opposed.

We walk by grace, not by works. We can't earn our way to Heaven. Jesus has already bought the ticket. Good works and good behavior are to be a natural by-product of our changed hearts though.

James 2:14-19

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

The works are the outward showing, the manifestation of what is on the inside. It shows that we are more "others-centered" than self-centered.

Another lesson we should take out of Ishmael and Hagar having to leave is that flesh and the spirit are at war with each other.

The flesh is defined as our Adamic nature, our human nature. We don't want to obey God by nature. After we are born again, we have a new spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells us. Our new spirit is constantly fighting our old body. We will get a new body one day, at the rapture, but until then we will be caught in this battle as the Apostle Paul was.

Rom. 7:14-19

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Paul struggled just as we do. Now that we are saved, there is this war that goes on inside of us. We want to do the right thing, but we aren't always able to do it. The child of God will be convicted about this.

Rom. 8:1-14

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in

that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. 10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

The answer to the question of how to live a holy life before God then is that we have to walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh. How do we do that? We have to be baptized in the Spirit. Now that isn't an event as much as it is a lifestyle. We have to be baptized (immersed) in the Holy Spirit, filled with Him on a daily basis because we leak. So every morning we have to ask God to fill us so that we are able to walk in the Spirit. This is why prayer and devotional time are so important.

Taking Paul's analogy, we can see Abraham separating from the flesh by sending Hagar and Ishmael away. He gave them just enough provision to get away and then left them. And that is what we have to do with things of the flesh. We have to leave somewhere. We can't feed them. We carry to the desert and leave them, letting God deal with them from there.

The Law and Grace shouldn't be mingled and neither should the Spirit and the flesh.

Abraham had to send Ishmael and Hagar away. He had to put away the flesh. That was also part of the symbolism of circumcision, the putting away of the flesh.

On a daily basis it can be a constant struggle. But as Spurgeon said, "Dead men don't wrestle."

[If we are dead to sin, we are free to live.](#) If we put our lives in God's grace, then we will cease to fight sin and let the love of God in our hearts change us from the inside out.

So today I am asking you, if you have been born again, to ask God to fill you with His Spirit. Give God your life and let him change you. If you try to change you, it will be a fight. If you yield to God it is much easier.

Will you still struggle with some things? Yes, but one by one they tend to go away. Feed on the Word and not the things of this world. Remember, it's like a computer, garbage in and garbage out.

So do like Abraham and put away the flesh, even though you may be fond of it, send it away with just enough provision to ensure that it gets away from you and dies.