

GENESIS 21:13-34

THE LONG TERM REPERCUSSIONS OF FLESHLY DECISIONS

We all have to make decisions; that is just a part of life. Some decisions are easy while others are gut wrenching. They can keep you up at night, making things difficult for a time or they can result in long-term consequences that can make things hard on us for a considerable period of time. In fact, some decisions bring about consequences with which we will struggle for the rest of our lives. Today, we will see that manifest in two separate events. The upside is that although both situations are somewhat sticky, God presided over them because the bad decisions were made by a family that was HIS.

Gen 21:12 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.

Gen 21:13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is* your seed."

Gen 21:14 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.

Gen 21:15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

Gen 21:16 And she went, and sat her down over against *him* a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against *him*, and lift up her voice, and wept.

Gen 21:17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he *is*.

Gen 21:18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

Gen 21:19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

Gen 21:20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

Gen 21:21 And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

- On the human side of things we feel badly for Hagar and Ishmael.
- On the spiritual side of things we need to realize that the flesh has to be put away.
- In the overall picture we need to see that God is in control. He didn't leave boy and his mother in the desert to die. In fact they lived out their lives in the same economic status to which they had become accustomed with Abraham.
- When they ran out of water – the flesh will drain you and drive you to a point of desperation and no hope. (Life in the Fast Lane... surely make you lose your mind.)
- God heard the LAD. He had been well taught by Abraham and sought God.

- When Hagar opened her eyes, there was a well. The flesh will blind you to the realities around you. It can either make you see things with rose colored glasses when they are anything but rosy, or make things look much bleaker than they actually are.
- It is the grace and will of God that bring us back to reality and allow us to put things in perspective.

WHEN THE TESTIMONY OF OUR LIFE AS A WHOLE OVERCOMES AN ISOLATED EVENT

You may have heard me use the analogy of a parade as a way of describing how God sees the beginning from the end. God doesn't exist in time as we know it. That is how He is eternal. He exists outside of time.

We however exist in time. We are in a sense trapped in it. When we get nostalgic, our old memories come in bits and pieces. As we focus on one particular event, our memory goes deeper into "the files" to pull up related memories.

At any rate, our memories of events and people tend to be chopped into pieces. Memories of people we like tend to be more nostalgic and sanitized. Memories for people we don't care for as much tend to be a little more negative. It has been said that love covers a multitude of sins. That is true. In our cases, the love of God has covered and taken away our sins. In another sense, our love for each other helps us to overlook each other's faults and to forgive one another.

We tend to give the benefit of the doubt to those we know and love.

But what about those we don't know so well?

We tend to go on first impressions. How many first impressions have we had the opportunity to make or break?

We also need to consider that we are making these first impressions even when we aren't aware of it. People are always watching us. They watch us interact with others and tend to draw conclusions based on things such as body motions. This may not be fair, but it is the way it is.

What we want to talk about today though is the first impressions we make personally. The first time we meet someone might be the last time we see him or her. We should want them to go away with a good impression. Why? Because we are to be a witness for Jesus. We need to start thinking about all of our interactions with people as witnessing opportunities. This is what they are even if we don't look at them this way.

What people think of us may be what they think of Jesus.

But what should we do if we blow the first opportunity?

That happened to Abraham. Today we will see the remedy for this situation.

So look at Genesis 21:22

Gen 21:22 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God *is* with you in all that you do.

Gen 21:23 Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that

according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt."

If you have been with us for our study in Genesis you will probably remember Abimelech. Abraham ran into him in chapter 20. Their first meeting wasn't a good one. If you recall Abraham journeyed down to Gerar and his first impression of the people there was that they were all heathens, so out of fear he told his wife, Sarah to act as if she was his sister.

God intervened and threatened to kill Abimelech if he took Sarah as his wife. He even went so far as to make all the women of the area barren. This would have essentially wiped the community off the map. They wouldn't have been able to reproduce.

Abimelech heeded God and confronted Abraham. Abraham then came clean.

Now what would you think of someone if they almost got you and all those around you killed because of a lie the first time you met them? This was not a good first impression on Abraham's part.

First of all he misjudged or you may even say pre-judged an entire community of people. And then because of this put his wife in a bind, almost causing her to be married to someone else. His lie almost meant the death of an entire community.

Abraham's wrong first impression caused him to abandon his own principals and thereby ruined the first impression he made on others.

We have to remember that Abraham was a very rich man. He was in a sense famous. When kings come to you for help you are well known in the all the surrounding areas. Therefore Abraham's reputation as an honest man, a man of God was widespread. His reputation preceded him. He just didn't live up to it.

We can't be guilty of that. We also have a reputation to live up to. Technically we are to live up to the reputation of Jesus. I know, that is impossible, but our lives have to be modeled after His. We have to be seen as honest, fair, just and modest at the very least.

Now let's get back to Genesis 21.

Gen 21:22 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God *is* with you in all that you do.

This is a case where Abraham gets a second chance. Why does he get this chance? Because Abimelech noticed that God was with Abraham in everything that he did.

Now go back to the analogy I used earlier of the parade. Abimelech could have used his first encounter with Abraham as his only gauge of Abraham, but he didn't. He wasn't just looking at one part of the parade. He watched the parade from the Goodyear blimp. He looked at the overall picture of Abraham's life. Some would call this "trend analysis."

Though Abraham gave no reason for Abimelech to see him as honorable the first time they met, it is obvious that God was with him. How is that?

- In that culture, wealth suggested that God was with someone.
- Abraham had a child in his old age.
- Abraham has a reputation for helping others.
- He is known for building altars.
- He is known as a worshipper of the one true God.
- So his whole life is being taken into account here.

Don't we all wish we could get a second chance like that?

Do you wish your whole life could be taken into account rather than one isolated incident?

Be careful before you answer that. We all have some things we don't to be known. Let's be more specific. Let's put it this way. Do you wish your entire Christian life could be taken into account rather than one isolated incident?

Be honest. Now, let me ask you this. How many of those so-called isolated events are coming to mind now? Do we have a good track record? Remember your overall life is made up of a whole lot of isolated events.

Now, even though Abimelech recognizes Abraham as a Godly man, he has been burned by him before. Therefore he intends to hold him to his honor.

Gen 21:23 Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt."

Gen 21:24 And Abraham said, "I will swear."

He asks Abraham to swear he will be honest with him. You can't blame him. He is just being a good business man. He is also being a good man and father. He wants a man of God to be his friend. Why? Because we are supposed to be the best friend a person can have. This is wisdom on Abimelech's part.

But what does the Bible say about having to swear an oath like this?

Mat 5:33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

Mat 5:34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;

Mat 5:35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Mat 5:36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

Mat 5:37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

The idea is that if you are honest and have that reputation, then all you should have to say is either yes or no. Your word is your bond. It should be able to be said of us, that if we say it then you can take it to the bank. And then we should make it so. Do whatever you have to do to stand behind your word, even if it is inconvenient.

Then we see that Abraham swore the oath.

In the next verse we see Abraham holding Abimelech's integrity to the test.

Gen 21:25 Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized.

Gen 21:26 And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard *of it* until today."

Wells were of great importance to a pastoral chief, and on the successful operation of sinking a new one, the owner was solemnly informed in person. If, however, they were allowed to get out of repair, the restorer acquired a right to them. In unoccupied lands the possession of wells gave a right of property in the land, and dread of this had caused the offense for which Abraham reproved Abimelech.

Abimelech had come to make a treaty. Abraham knew that the treaty would only stand if the issue of the well was dealt with.

Abimelech told Abraham that he knew nothing of it. Therefore as a matter of course he ordered that the well be restored to Abraham.

Gen 21:27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.

Gen 21:28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

Gen 21:29 Then Abimelech asked Abraham, "What *is the meaning of* these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?"

Gen 21:30 And he said, "You will take *these* seven ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well."

Gen 21:31 Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because the two of them swore an oath there.

Abraham gave Abimelech the seven lambs as a material sign that he was actually the one that dug the well. This sealed the deal and they made the covenant.

I would also like for you to look at it this way. Abraham put something of value behind his words. Abraham's friendship was more than just words. Seven lambs were worth a lot of money. Abraham had something invested in the relationship.

Jas 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

Jas 2:9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

Jas 2:14 What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

Jas 2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

Jas 2:16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be *ye* warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit?

Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Is your friendship with others more than words? Can you be counted on if they are in need? Are we willing to get our hands dirty as friends? Are we more than fair weather friends?

Mat 5:40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.

Mat 5:41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

Mat 5:42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

Mat 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'

Mat 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Mat 5:45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Mat 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Mat 5:47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

Mat 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

As Christians, we are to go above and beyond the call of duty. It is our duty, because of the love and grace that has been shown us by God.

Gen 21:32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.

Gen 21:33 And *Abraham* planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.

Gen 21:34 And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.

So they parted as friends and Abraham praised the Lord. As you can see, this was a regular part of his life, as it should be with us.

Summary:

We don't always get a second chance to make a first impression. Therefore we need to treat every day, every confrontation, every action, every conversation, as a first impression. If we become conscious of this it will change our lives. If we don't treat relationships this way it effects our walk with Jesus.

Mat 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Mat 5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Mat 5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Fix the relationship. Jesus said to leave your offering at the altar and reconcile, then come back give your offering.

Reconcile and come to an agreement. Be the one that reaches out.

Mat 5:25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Own up to your mistakes and ask God to help you cope with the aftermath. Better yet, consult God in all that you do and bring the problem to a minimum in the first place.

Make your life one that makes others want to befriend you. Then give them what makes you that way, a relationship with Jesus.