OPENING COMMENT

There are many times when God's promises are undefined and slightly nebulous. Instead of outlining exactly what he is doing, when he is doing it, and how he will accomplish it, he simply says trust me. It is in these moments that we find ourselves looking at the cultural norms around us and wondering if we should take matters into our own hands. This is exactly what is occurring in our text this week.

READ THE TEXT: Genesis 16

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. [2] And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. [3] So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. [4] And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. [5] And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" [6] But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

[7] The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. [8] And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." [9] The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." [10] The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will surely multiply

your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." ¹¹ And the angel of the Lord said to her,

"Behold, you are pregnant
    and shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
    because the Lord has listened to your affliction.
¹² He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
    his hand against everyone
    and everyone's hand against him,
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."

¹³ So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." ¹⁴ Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Who does Sarai hold responsible for her barrenness?
2. Given the interaction with God in Genesis 15, what about the end of verse 2 is significant?
3. What is the result of the human plan? (vs. 4, 5, 6)
4. What is the command of the Angel to Hagar? (vs. 9)
5. What does Ishmael mean?
6. What prophecy does the angel make of Ishmael?
7. After Hagar's encounter with the Angel of the Lord how does she define God?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. This passage shows clearly the disaster that comes from human born plans that are divorced from God's promises. How has this reality been displayed in your life?
2. Abram and Sarai devise a plan "B" instead of waiting for God's plan to form. Instead of listening to God they fell back on cultural norms to get what they wanted. Where do we fall into the same trap?
3. How is understanding God as a God who sees and a God who hears both comforting and challenging?

4. God's command for Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her is difficult to understand in our culture. Where has God called us to return and submit even when the conditions are oppressive?
5. The Ishmaelite's become a thorn in the side of the Israelites and continue to be one to this day. How might we understand God's blessing on them in verse 10?
6. How do we discern the direction, will, and promise of God as we move throughout our day and struggle with the difficulties of life?
7. How does submitting to God's promises and plans, even when there are natural solutions to fall back on, provide a witness to the outside world?

BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Genesis 3 – The first example where God instructs Man and man does nothing to uphold God's words.
2. Genesis 37:25-28 – The Ishmaelite's buy Joseph and sell him into slavery in Egypt.
3. Romans 4:13-25 – Paul's reflection on Abraham and his faith while considering his wife's barrenness.
4. Galatians 4:21-31 – Paul expounds on the relationship between Hagar and Sarah and their offspring.
5. Hebrews 11:8-12 – Abraham and Sarah's faith in the promises of God outlined despite this challenge.

CONCLUSION

Abram's failure to heed the word of the Lord and instead heed the cultural norms caused conflict that continues to this day. Yet, even in Abram's failures God is faithful to reveal himself and redeem the mess. Instead of leaving Hagar to suffer he sees her, hears her, and promises her prosperity through her son. Although God is merciful and compassionate there are long reaching consequences to this misstep of faith.

We would do well to learn from this circumstance and remember that God's promise and plan is always better than our plan B. Our culture may have readily available and seemingly good solutions to our challenge's, but we would be wise to weight them against the word of God. This is not a practice motivated out of fear of miss stepping, but in faith that God's plan and purpose is more glorious than we can imagine. Even when the way forward is nebulous it is good to remind ourselves that Jesus is always better.

SHARE & PRAY

_____

LIFE GROUP VISION:

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through his Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one anther toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.