

Kings Norton Baptist Church

Sunday 22nd January 2022 10 am

Obstacles to faith (Learning from Sarai Genesis 16)

Welcome to all.

Opening Scripture

Hymn MP 381 Name of all majesty

Scripture Psalm 145 (page 631)

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Children's talk Running the race – with hurdles!

Chorus MP 306, I will call upon the Lord.

MP 307 I will enter

Testimony

Prayer time

Reading Genesis 16:1-16 (page 16), Genesis 21:1-7 (page 21)

Hymn MP 1141 You're the word of God the Father

Sermon Obstacles to faith (Learning from Sarai Genesis 16)

Hymn MP 41 At the Name of Jesus (accompanied)

Closing Prayer

Close

582 Rock of Ages cleft for me.

Prayer & Exordium

■ Hurdles, what are the hurdles in the race of faith?

Here in Gen 16 we can see at close quarters several ways in which Sarai and Abram falter in their trust of what the Lord had said, in their race of faith.

In the first part of the chapter, v1-4a we see the obstacles, then more briefly several of the consequences of their actions.

This chapter recalls how Sarai gave Abram her servant girl Hagar (probably acquired when in Egypt) and she gave birth to a boy, now here at last was the child they wanted. What seemed a good idea to them didn't quite go to plan. Why didn't they wait and trust the Lord?

Here we see four obstacles to faith. *'delay, reason, self and culture.* x2

The first is:

Delay, Time, or should I say my 'impatience with delay'

Before Abram had moved into the promised land **"The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."** Gen 12:7

In Gen 16:3 we read **So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.** Ten years had gone by. How long do you wait? Does time change anything? How long before you decide to act?

■ On Friday I had to stop at traffic lights in Kings Heath. I was sure they were working properly for they had just turned red when I arrived. First in the queue. It was a 4 way light, I waited. Then I could see in my mirror a car overtaking the queue and continue straight on through waving us to do likewise. I waited, yet no change. Another car came racing up and did exactly the same. I waited. Then I thought it did seem a long time - and went through - and all the rest followed. Done that??

But God's promises do not go wrong, fail and break down like the traffic lights. In the ten years since the departure from Haran the promise had been reiterated (12:4, 13:15), but Sarai decided enough was enough, the time had come for her to act. She was still without a child, alternate hopes focusing on Lot and Eliezer had been frustrated. God hadn't done what he said, and now it was time for her to take matters into her own hands.

Last week we considered patience, how Noah had waited patiently, how the people of God had waited patiently, this is how to live in faith, trusting that God will do what he said he will do. Sarai's patience - and faith - had run out

We see this with King Saul who did not wait for the arrival of Samuel and started to do what only the priests were allowed to do. The pressures were rising and he didn't want to wait any longer. He was being tested. The moment he gave in Samuel arrived and said: "**What have you done? You acted foolishly, You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart (King David) and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command.**" 1 Samuel 13:11-14

Sarai through the same impatience of delay resorted to a method of obtaining a child by her husband at variance with the word of God. – "*Sarai don't forget delay is designed by God to test and strengthen faith.*"

God's word says **do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you,** 2 Peter 3:8,9

An impatient heart, is a faithless heart. Let your mind prevail not your heart.

- Wellington CCF - age 15, a couple of hours in the trench with no sign of activity and I think everybody has gone home without me. Why couldn't I have a bit more grit and stand by what I knew in my mind and had heard, remembering that soldiers always march to the last order - and keep going until I hear it is changed or rescinded.
- A world war II Japanese soldier was found still at his post in 1972! Shoichi Yokoi, 82, a former sergeant then returned to Japan after surviving alone in a jungle hide-out on the Pacific island of Guam. Still living to the last order!

So beware of thinking – that was a long time ago, that was then, some say “well if God was to speak to me now then I would respond - but that was then. No God's word is living and eternal it does not have a 'best before' date or 'stop listening by' date! It has not been changed or rescinded.

Don't follow the prevailing view that anything that happened in the past is unreliable and not to be trusted. Don't say 'it must happen now'. Jesus speaks to this when he says to those who know that hell is coming and try to warn others: '**They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.**' To which they reply '**but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.**' "**Jesus said: 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'**" Luke 16:29-31

Those who make this excuse still wouldn't believe if Jesus stood here now!

2a

The next problem to faith is our:

Reason

'*Science has disproved God*', '*unless I see with my own eyes I will not believe*'. Do you like to rationalise things, they must make sense to me. That is to put God in the dock and make your mind the arbiter of truth, 'I must understand it', the motive behind this is control, to take God's place. This is what the devil tempted Eve with, **for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.** Gen 3:5 In other words YOU can now be the one who decides good and evil.

✚ **But God has spoken and we would do well to trust Him. Believe what is said - because of the One saying it.**

God's promise of a child was not natural, it is supernatural, but not contrary to reason for He can do it. Even though they lived a long time she was getting older and she was barren and had passed the age of child bearing. She shows her lack of faith by saying to herself "I don't see how this could be, it is not logical or natural, so I don't think it is possible". Sarai does not believe that God can do what he says. "It's impossible, I am too old".

Maybe there is a third way, I will help God along. I will do what I can do - and God will do his bit. "**God helps those who help themselves right**"

What did you see?

- Roger Flukes when he was here before Christmas spoke about a little boy keen to buy a ticket to the circus coming to town. He came home from school excited and eager to get the money from his dad. Unfortunately, his father was unable to afford the price of the ticket, he simply made enough money to keep bread on the table and pay the rent. However, he suggested that the boy went out and worked on odd jobs then if he could raise half the money he would give him the other half. A few days before the circus came to town the boy emptied his bank and found that he had raised enough money to pay for half the ticket, His father, as promised gave him the other half.

So often people see God that way. They say things like "Christ died for sin on the cross but now I must live a godly life to go to heaven. Jesus has done his part - and now I must do my part".

On the Cross † for all sin past present and future, Gospel of 100% grace. God has promised if you trust in Christ alone he will give you the gift of everlasting life. – He can and will do it. 100% grace no top-ups. That requires humility – and many are just not willing to give wanting to 'do'.

2b

Sarai was going to do her bit, a new remedy to help God along, she would give her maid to Abram in order that he might obtain the promised heir. This plan of marrying a second wife did not originate with Abram, but with Sarai. How many of you wives here this morning would you be willing to find another wife or woman for your husband? How desperate, x2 what could be behind such a thing? Yes there is another force at work the:

Self x2. Sarai is keen for self-advancement.

Sarai wants a family! **perhaps I can build a family through her. I can** x2 How 'self gets in the way, how self is the problem how 'self' twists the thinking.

Sarai's mind is on herself, her own barrenness, her old age. She begins to despair of offspring. unless Abram should have children from some other quarter for she remembers that God had said the **heir a son would come from his own body** Gen 15:4. Otherwise couldn't she have adopted a son? At least that would have been legitimate. Surely that is better than giving Abram a second wife.

Maybe she thought 'I will have that son and he will still love me' Huh. Have you got it all sorted Sarai? Can have it your way, trouble free? How foolish.

✚ Beware, do not allow your desire to so ferment into desperation that it then drives you to act at variance with the plain will of God!

God designed that the human race should be propagated by sacred marriage. Sarai perverts the law of marriage by defiling the conjugal bed which was appointed only for two persons. It ought to have been regarded as a settled point that one woman is joined to one man, 'that the two should be one flesh.' Whatever the world around does in terms of promiscuity and polygamy it is never for man to cut across God's divine purpose for a man and woman.

Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Hebrews 13:4

✚ God's people are different - we wait on the Lord. Single Christian men, single Christian women wait on the Lord to provide the right life partner in due time. Don't force your way and end up in a misery and a mess. Don't marrying the wrong person and snooker your faith.

As David said: "I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry." Psalms 40:1. Do not hasten before the time, do not with a discontent heart try to force the provision of God - and break his good commands. Wait.

✚ The sin of self - "Those who determine not to put self to death will never see the will of God fulfilled in their lives." *Sadhu Sundar* Last week's bulletin

Then there's '**Culture**'

What of the cultural context **perhaps I can build a family through her.**

Sarai's suggestion that Abram take Hagar as a concubine was in keeping with the practice of that day. Local law allowed for a barren wife to acquire a slave-woman for her husband. Sometimes a wife received a personal maid as a marriage gift. We see this later with Jacob. "Laban gave his servant girl **Billah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant.**" Gen 29:29. So when Rachel was not bearing children what did she do? Rachel said to her husband Jacob: "Here is **Billah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family.**" Gen 30:3

All legal rights over this maid's child belonged to the wife. Laws governing this type of arrangement provided for precisely the contingency we see here with Abram and Sarai. 'My injustice upon you' is the literal translation of the Hebrew. Sarai appealed to Abram to enforce her legal rights. It was his responsibility to redress the wrong. Hagar wins our sympathy, but she was legally in the wrong.

✚ There are always social and cultural clashes with faith in God. The wise man can spot them. The weak man or woman is led by them.

God makes culture to reflect His Glory, but godliness hides behind culture. But ask the question does this cultural habit glorify God? or does it cut across my trust, my faith in Him? To be Dutch and often wear orange does not, or to be British and like battered fish does not cut across my faith in God.

✚ It is now socially acceptable to be late, to not to do what you say, to not reply to messages, to be dishonest, to steal from your employer or the government. Culture is shown in clothes fashion which is often immodest. In Britain it is acceptable to divorce, it is acceptable to abort unwanted babies, it is acceptable to not work although you can, it is the norm to leave your family to the state to look after when it should be us. All this is contrary to the word of God. Don't let culture drive you away from God.

Let me summarise these obstacles

God's unchanging word was for then, it is for now, for today, and for tomorrow. God's word is counter intuitive, counter our logic and our instinct for it is not about me but about God. God's word is pan-cultural and often counter-cultural. It is not subject to the changing whims of man and society.

Sarai displays her faithless heart when she says: "**The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.**" What a contradiction how can she say "**The LORD has** and then negate the Lord's power by making her own way. It is a bit like saying 'no Lord'. Both Ezekiel and Peter have this in common they both say 'no Lord'! How can he be Lord if you say no!! Do you do that? Sing the songs, say amen to peoples prayers and the reading of the scriptures that speak about Jesus as Lord - and then in your heart it is 'No'. x2

Consequences

What about the consequences? yes there always are always consequences.

Consequence 1

Sarai faltered in her faith and caused Abram to falter in his faith. She wants him to go along with her ungodly plan. Just as with Adam whom God said that he had **listened to his wife** Eve. Not to hear what she said, but to listen to ungodly persuasion, to do it, to act on it. To join in with her in it.

✚ Calvin says: we see Abram, who through so many years had bravely contended like an invincible combatant, and had surmounted so many obstacles, now yielding, in a single moment, to temptation. Who among us will not fear for himself in similar danger? Therefore, although we may have stood long and firmly in the faith, we must daily pray that God would not lead us into temptation.

Beware – Satan tempts us through our nearest and dearest, and those friends. It is often those closest to you; a family member, your spouse who tries to persuade you to take the easy road. It all sounds so plausible, don't do it – it will lead you not to trust in God.

On Wednesday we saw how King Rehoboam took the advice of his young friends, his school friends, those he had grown up with. The temptation is most dangerous when it is sent by a hand that is least suspected. Wisdom says consider not so much who speaks - but what is spoken.

Sarah's lack of faith is seen in that she laughed 18:12. But then did Abraham also show his lack of faith as well and laugh 17:17.

Consequence 2

Tension between Abram and Sarai. 5 **Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering.** 'You', the blame game, the shifting of blame just as in the garden. How incredible - was it not clearly her idea?

I put my servant in your arms, yet Abram is responsible because he fell for it.

4a

And as the head he takes the responsibility – and the blame - for everything. Husbands when you wife does well you praise her. When your wife does wrong, is it not your failing as the family head? Sorry yes it is!

Consequence 3

Now we see Abram in a tension, he is confusion and compromised 'what should I do'? what does he do? 6 "**Your servant is in your hands,**" **Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best."** This is his wife the mother of his child and his mother whom he should defend. This is also culturally the property of his other wife Saria, he is in the middle. What does he do, wisely arbitrate? No, He gives the responsibility over the her, to Sarai. *Get a grip man take responsibility for your actions!*

That is what sin does, especially in the family with multiple wives and children from different parents, it makes things become messy and difficult.

Satan loves to split people up, he laughs to! *Divide and conquer* is his motto.

Consequence 4

and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me." Yes and tension for Sarai from Hagar. 4 **Hagar...when she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.** Let me introduce you to female jealousy! Do not underestimate it!

Consequence 5

Tension for Hagar from Sarai 6. **Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar; so she fled from her.** Sarai never thought it would come to this? Where was 'her child' now?!

Consequence 6

Ongoing hostility - 12 **He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers.**" (As a separated nation)

Welcome to today's middle eastern crisis. Ishmael's hostility lasts through the generations to the present day. Ishmael is the father of the Arab peoples. And it is the Arab race who are set against the descendants of Isaac the Jews.

Sum up - The obstacles to coming to faith, and the obstacles to living by faith are the same: time delay, relying on your reason, self in the way, listening to the world's ways all leave you away from God and out of His will.

Sarai would have done better to together with Abram continue to trust God's word and promises. In due time Sarai gave birth to Isaac through whom the Lord's blessing were promised, that is through the one in his line Jesus Christ, and all who have faith in Him.

END

4b