

(aka God): God who hears me

Reconnect – May 15, 2011

Text: Genesis 21:8-21; Hebrews 10:19-25

Key Thought: The God who heard Hagar still intervenes: he meets us in our desperation and offers us hope.

But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, “Hagar, what’s wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.” Then God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. (Gen. 21:17-20, NLT)

Pre-Intro: Video – Rolling In The Deep (Adele)

Q: So... what’s this song about, anyway?

- The anger of a woman scorned – I showed the video because of the powerful representation of that anger and frustration in so many different ways and what that can lead to – the sparks that can fly

Intro: The story so far...

Q: Tell the story from last week and what we talked about – tell them if they want to cheat and they brought a Bible, they can go to Genesis 16... (make people just give one thing at a time)

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, “The Lord has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her.” And Abram agreed with Sarai’s proposal. So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)

So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. Then Sarai said to Abram, “This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she’s pregnant she treats me with contempt. The Lord will show who’s wrong—you or me!” Abram replied, “Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

The angel of the Lord found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. The angel said to her, “Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?” “I’m running away from my mistress, Sarai,” she replied. The angel of the Lord said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.” Then he added, “I will give you more descendants than you can count.”

And the angel also said, “You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the Lord has heard your cry of distress. This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives.”

Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord, who had spoken to her. She said, “You are the God who sees me.” She also said, “Have I truly seen the One who sees me?” ...So Hagar gave Abram a son, F

Key Thought: The God who saw Hagar still engages people: he helps in our troubles and leads us to obey Him.

Sixteen years later...

- Roughly sixteen years have passed since Hagar gave birth to Abraham's son Ishmael
- During most of that time, Sarah had done a slow burn, watching Abraham's delight at his son and their relationship, and his desire to see Ishmael be the "child of promise" – even if God had never yet said "yes" to Abraham's prayers in that direction
- Hagar has survived in Sarah's employ by virtue of the leverage given her by her son and the unique, dysfunctional dynamic of the household has not changed (imagine, every day... yikes!)
- Things went on like this until Ishmael hit thirteen – the age of manhood in that culture
- It was about four years ago that God had once again promised that Abraham and Sarah would have a child together – and it was on that day that Hagar had seen her life take another turn, her position once again in question
- The year after that, miraculously, and to Hagar's dismay, her "mistress" DID have a child with Abraham, and they named him "Chuckles" (he laughs) because Sarah – the eternally crabby, sarcastic, bitter old Sarah – had laughed at God's promise – and then had laughed with true joy for perhaps the first time in her life on experiencing the birth of her son
- Since then, camp life has been upside down – Ishmael has been put to the side – he's not cute anymore, he's not the centre of Abraham's world – Abe is back in the world of diapers and wipes and bottles and late-night feedings and doctor's appointments and baby toys and baby talk and home video of everything the baby does (or the 2000BC nomadic middle eastern equivalent of all that)
- Hagar has pinned all her hopes for the last 13 years on the status of her son – his hopes, his dreams have all been identical to hers – and now, she doesn't really know what to do – so she serves and waits to see what will happen
- But just like so many years before, something happens that isn't her choice...

Read/Explain Text: Genesis 21:8-21

When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac. So she turned to Abraham and demanded, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won't have it!" This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. But God told Abraham, "Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar's son because he is your son, too."

- Mocking – laughing at Chuckles, or worse
- Not clear if Ishmael is clowning around with him or actually endangering him – but it seems that Sarah sees a pattern forming, what her son Isaac's life will be like with a teenager present in his life – and she doesn't want it – remember, Ishmael is the "wild donkey boy" and the apple of Abraham's eye
- Ishmael's name is actually not used at all in this story – Sarah won't even say his NAME, or Hagar's – that boy, her son, that woman
- Sarah gives Abraham an impossible choice, after all the poor ones he has already made – but God reassures him that even though this is really bad, that God is still in control of both children's destinies

So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. "I don't want to watch the boy die," she said, as she burst into tears.

- Abraham puts some snacks in a backpack (yes, he does have baby-brain) and sends them out into the desert alone – not even an escort, not even a paid trip back to Egypt, just puts them out on the street
- Hagar is finally free – Abraham has given her freedom from being a slave – but that freedom is terrifying for her because he has given her nothing else – no escort, no passage, nothing
- Hagar's chances of survival are almost nil, barring a miracle of God – you just don't go out and camp in that day and age, and she doesn't have any wilderness survival skills anyway – she has no map, no guide, no protection from bandits and slave traders
- So once the granola bars and the fishy crackers and juice boxes run out, they are really stuck
- Hagar once more is being punished for something that wasn't her choice – and the impossible dilemma – the child you love has done something very wrong – what do you do, who do you love, how do you react to that? But their destinies are linked and she loves him
- She cries bitter tears – she's given up all hope – and she puts him under a tree, near death, and stumbles far enough away that she won't be able to hear him die
- This is déjà vu all over again – she's been here before, 16 years ago – this is where her life has taken her, full circle – but this time, instead of her getting herself into trouble, it's her son

But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, "Hagar, what's wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants." Then God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

- "God has heard the boy" – his name IS "God hears", after all
- God miraculously provides a well to meet their imminent survival needs, and Hagar quickly jumps back into things – her despondency is gone, courtesy of a well out in the middle of nowhere
- God reaffirms his promise to Ishmael, that he will become a great nation

And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skilful archer, and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt. Gen. 21:1-21

- "God was with the boy" – fatherless now, no inheritance, no place – but God steps in for Abraham, cares for the family, and Ishmael ultimately becomes a wilderness survivor – an outdoorsy type who learns how to live off just about anything and nothing all at the same time
- And then Hagar is back to making difficult decisions – putting her son first, his life – she finds him a wife from Egypt – somehow she reaches out to old contacts, people she knew, and sets up her son with a nice Egyptian girl
- Ultimately Ishmael and Isaac will reunite at their father's grave in about 70 years or so, and the only other mention of Ishmael is all his descendants – God does keep his promise to the boy who so quickly became fatherless

Ishmael: God hears

- Hagar loses all hope – ever been there? When things seemed so bad you just wanted to give up? Or maybe you actually DID give up?
- Desperate times make us desperate – Hagar thought she could do it, all the way out of site of the tents she thought there would be a way – but as day turned into night and day again, she realized that they were lost, and there was no-one coming to rescue them – they were going to die and she couldn't be to see her “child of promise” die – she couldn't bear it
- But God sees, and God hears – He hears her heart's cry, not just her crying – He hears all the years of frustration and pain and poor choices and drama and sticking it to her mistress – he hears all of her bitter tears, just like he has heard everything she has ever said, ever thought – he hears all the misery of her history – he hears her heart
- Nothing happens without him knowing, nothing we say gets past him – the power of our words, because it takes our thoughts out of our minds and puts them on display for those around us – then it's clear what we're thinking
- “Better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and prove it beyond all doubt” – various

Key Thought:

The God who heard Hagar still intervenes: he meets us in our desperation and offers us hope.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. **Hebrews 10:19-25, NLT**

- Hope continues – it has to, and God is the giver of all Hope – even when things are worse than you could ever imagine, where there's life, there's Hope, if you put your life in God's hands
- The weight of our past, our guilty consciences, our shame – all of it goes into “the wall” that each of us has hit at different times – the place where you just can't go forward but you have to but you can't

(the importance of a clear commitment for you and others – sprinkled with blood (saved) and washed with water (baptized) – and then mutual motivation – no-one cast into the wilderness, no-one left behind in God's economy – that's what he does, that's who he is, we're in this together)

Conclusion: Desperate moments

- Where's your desperation this morning? What is weighing heavy on your shoulders? What can't you get away from, no matter how much you try to distract yourself or convince yourself that everything is fine?
- Or worse, what have you given up on? What have you left so far away that you can't even hear it anymore? What can't you even think about anymore?

Response: Hagar's parenting? Discussion? Parental perspectives on the perils of being Hagar? Or "Deliver Me" from the band?