

Series: *Genesis: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"*

Sermon: *"What Should I Do?"*

Text: *Genesis 16*

RGGJR/FBCCS/5-30-21 *UNEDITED*

- *Genesis 16*. This is a difficult chapter of *Genesis* to preach. When you look at it, you might think I say this because of the content of the chapter. It certainly involves activity that isn't acceptable for marriage today.
- But, believe me, as odd as the cultural practice we will read about in chapter 16 might sound to most all of us, we will encounter far worse chapters along these lines in *Genesis*. I'm already not relishing the opportunity, Lord willing, to tell the stories of Dinah and the Shechemites and the Judah and Tamar. Maybe the Lord will return in the Rapture before we get to chapters 34 and 38!
- No, it's not the content that makes this one difficult. It is the application of the truth the content teaches. This passage in *Genesis 16* and later the story of Jacob at the Jabbok River in chapter 32 teach two different but connected truths about God and humans relating to their God that I wish I could learn once-for-all, but I never seem to do that.
- The truth embedded for us in the living words of *Genesis 16* is a truth from God that I must relearn and reapply anew at some of the toughest times to do that in my life.
- When I am struggling, I read this chapter, or, at least, recall this chapter's teaching, I think about it; I ask how it applies; I decide; and then I still ask, ***"Yes! That's right! That's the truth! BUT, what should I DO??!!"***
- I have no doubt, after hearing me teach this morning, some of us will still walk out of here saying, ***"Yes! That's right, Raleigh! That's the truth of Genesis 16! That's what God is saying! BUT, Raleigh what should I DO??!!"***

- As an indicator of how deeply engrained the issue of this chapter is ingrained in us as it is in all humans, I want you to do something for me as I read through the chapter and you follow along.
- As we read, please look for hints of a pattern we have seen before in *Genesis* in the experience of a husband and wife and their relationship with God. There is not an exact correspondence of every point in this chapter with the earlier narrative but the hints of the pattern that Moses leaves, in my opinion, cannot be accidental.
- I think he wants us to know that there is something basic to humans at work in this chapter as it was in an earlier chapter.
- Listen for echoes please as I read *Genesis 16*. **READ GENESIS 16:1-15**
- Did you hear *echoes*? (***What is the parallel? What is the pattern?***)
- These relatives of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, have inherited more than strictly biological traits from their ancestors.
- Like Eve, Sarai wonders if God may have kept back something “good” from her—a child. Maybe God is selfish and holds back good.
- Like Eve, Sarai wonders if just PERHAPS, her human plan to do something to remedy this possible selfishness of God will be better than God’s apparent plan to hold something back from her.
- Like Eve, Sarai reaches out with a human plan to make her life somehow better than God has made it—she acts on her doubts about the character—the very nature of her God.
- Like Eve, to Sarai, the intended outcome of the human plan seems to be a good thing—in Eve’s case, good for food and pleasing to the eye—to Sarai, good for making God’s very own promise of an offspring as uncountable as dust and as numerous as the stars in the dark desert sky. The human action looked like an action that would make God’s plan come true faster and maybe even better.

- Like Eve, Sarai's plan put into action brought unintended and negative consequences that impacted her life in a lose/lose sort of way. Hagar despises her. There is now something God must judge between her and her husband. She feels forced to be a mean woman to the maid who now despises her.
- Like Adam, this story reads full of the passivity of Abram in his wife's plan. He simply goes along without any indication of trying to teach her about God or his truth.
- Like it was with Adam and Eve, you'll find in verse 7, the Angel of the Lord, likely the preincarnate Son of God, *LOOKING*, for someone and finding them, just as he called out, *"Where are you?"* in the Garden.
- Like it was with Adam and Eve, the Lord speaks some blessings and cursings on the life of Hagar and her baby following the incident.
- I believe Moses is saying the root of the sin of Eve remains in all humans including Sarai and Abram.
- The desire of humans to play God with their lives pushes all humans to attempt to live autonomously from God.
- The mortality of human—Abram and Sarai knew they would not live for ever—pushes humans to actions that betray a lack of trust in the goodness of God.
- The mortality of Abram and Sarai, considered through the narrow lens of them being the center of the universe made it seem to them they knew how all things work. One thing they thought they knew for sure from their narrow—I'm God—perspective was that 80 some-year old people didn't have babies in their day.
- They were certain they had the facts and the big picture as pertained to God's promises. They felt justified in doing something on that basis.

- Deep inside, humans believe they are **doing** good things, or at least justified things, to fix what God has missed or done wrong in their lives especially as time seems to be running out on them.
- Human beings, mostly believe, with all their heart that doing something is better than not doing something while.
- They believe this even if they will not admit this to themselves.
- They believe this even because they can convince themselves and even get the validation of others that they are indeed doing good—they are doing what will make the plan of God work. They need to do something because God isn't doing anything—at least as far as they can see from their center-of-the universe perspective—God isn't doing what he needs to do.
- If we plug this human propensity to believe doing something is always better than doing nothing into the rest of the book of *Genesis*, we find it showing up everywhere—both backward to things like building tall towers and forward to things like deceiving an old blind Father to make God's blessings come true.
- We also find seeded throughout the book the answer for whenever we have the faith to read its living words and believe it is truth.
- If you heard last weeks lesson, one seemingly passing comment I made was about how God tended to present himself to humans almost all of the time.
- There have been times in the preceding chapters that God deals with an attack on his plan to bring about the lineage of redemption—from inside the family and outside the family—there are times when God says, "***This is what I am going to do!***"
- There are times when God actually let's his human agents in on what his actions will be. But please go back and forth in *Genesis*—or do it in the whole of the Pentateuch—or the whole of Scripture—God most

often tells his people not the details of what he will do but tells them the details of who he is.

- The problem is, we humans are like our mother and because we know we won't live forever, her issue is worsened in us. We want **DOING** and not so much **BEING**.
- In the previous chapter, God wanted Abram to know he was the LORD. In the land of Midian Moses asked and God answered, "*I Am who I Am.*"
- In the *Gospel of John* the Lord Jesus Christ said things like, I Am the bread, I am the light of the world, I am the door, I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way the truth and the life, and I am the true vine.
- I'm sensing a pattern. Are you? Humans like us very often hear these Words from God and conclude: "Fantastic that you are that BUT what will you DO??!!" You need to DO something! Well, maybe I need to do something because time is passing and I can't see how your promises will work out.
- That's your will, right God? You didn't call me to be passive. You called me to get your plan and promises done in my life, the life of my family, in my church, in this world—right God? And by the way friend over there who also is longing to do something you agree with me right? We ought to do something in Jesus' name!
- Well, not exactly says God. You are off by just about 2% but you'll miss my purpose by a trillion miles. Yes I have made you and I have called you to act to fulfill my purpose for you as my image bearers in this world.
- BUT, and here is the potential 2% deflection off course that matters so much. I have called you to act ONLY EVER out of knowing who I am and believing that truth and trusting that truth. I have never

called you to act out of a sense that you must DO something because that is better than doing nothing.

- That impulse comes from your mother Eve. It is more about you being a god and getting glory and a name for yourself. It is more about making your life and the world work the way you see it should work from a narrow, false, center-of-the-universe perspective than that it is about trusting me as God for **my** glory and name.
- I know it doesn't feel that way to you because doing something always seems to be better than doing nothing from your limited perspective. However, that is why I wrote much of the Word of God down for you in the Scriptures. You'll find most of it is dealing with this very issue of trusting who I Am.
- Just as I told Abram that when I told him a little of what I was going to do. He would have to trust the who I am not to choke on the truth that his offspring wouldn't have the land for 400 years—long after he would be dead and gone.
- Just as I recorded my son saying "Apart from me you can do nothing so abide in me the true vine." I know sometimes you want to interpret that to mean if you are a good, **abiding** Christian, whatever you conclude that means depending on your denominational upbringing—whatever that means you want it to mean I will feed your impulse to do something! I will even, if you are good enough give you secret messages that no one else has about doing—because it feels so much better to do something rather than nothing.
- You will need to trust who I am—my being and not your doing even when you have convinced yourself I have told you the exact plan so you can make it work out in your lifetime because you know you won't live 400 years either.

- Raleigh, can that really be what this passage teaches? If so, what will I **DO**??!! There it is again isn't it?
- Let me make a few comments to show you why I believe this is the truth of this passage and you can decide what you will **DO** about that!
- The "sleeping with the maid" part—don't let that throw you. Like it or not, it was an acceptable method for dealing with infertility in Abram's time.
- What really matters is what Sarai says outright in the second half of verse 2 as she sells here plan to pick and eat to Abram: **"Go sleep with my maidservant; PERHAPS I can build a family through her."**
- **"Perhaps"** ought to be clue enough. We humans just can't know what our own plans to **DO** something rather than nothing will actually accomplish. That **perhaps**, actually tells the whole story for me. That **perhaps** is what I so often identify with when I am fighting the truth here. That **perhaps**, bolstered by the agreement, the approval of other believers, culture, science, whatever else, somehow, sometimes, maybe even very often becomes labeled for me as **God's** plan.
- Forgive me for judging but doesn't Sarai sound as if "building this family God has promised sort of depends on her doing it?" Don't we sometimes, maybe more often than we would like to think, walk around in life believing important things—even things as important as God's plan—depend on me **doing** them??!!
- The outcome of this human **doing** with Hagar—I wish I had the courage and the gall to call it what one old, long-gone, whitehaired, cigar-smoking Pentecostal preacher called it to denigrate living this way—but I don't.

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- The outcome of this human **DOING**, as always, was bound to bring complications to human living and to God's plan being fulfilled by these human agents of God. Our ways are indeed short-sighted and always have unintended consequences.
- You can understand how the hatred and strife between Sarai and Hagar grew until one of them had to leave the family.
- Can we understand how far this 2% deviation took things in terms of unintended consequences? To this day, the hatred and strife between the children of Ishmael and the children of the yet-to-be-born Isaac remains in our human world. There is hardly a time when this strife is not frontpage news in our world.
- Our human **doing** always brings relational issues, if from nothing else the consequences of our plan not producing the feelings or the results we wanted and expected. Sarai blames the strife from her plan on Abram. He has made her "suffer" because he listened to her and did what she asked.
- She is right to be angry but probably not for the reasons she is. Abram shouldn't have listened to her and should have protected her from this grief instead of validating her human doing.
- But I get why he did the weak thing. People don't like it when you refuse to validate or question their human doing. It takes great energy for them to convince themselves this is what God wants done so how dare you suggest they may be wrong??!!
- But guess what, as revealing as all these things are about the negative consequences of human doing, this is not the heart of the message of Genesis 16.
- That message comes as a slave woman, likely picked up on a questionable sojourn in Egypt because of a famine—when that slave

woman finds herself absolutely helpless in the desert—absolutely unable to **DO** anything human to fix it.

- In that absolutely unable to DO anything position—the LORD himself or, at the very least, a messenger of the LORD finds her.
- Guess why he can find her. It is because he is the LORD who has been SEEING her all along.
- This SEEING, which becomes the repeated lesson of this chapter, is what Sarai and Abram forgot. It is what we sometimes forget as we watch life and things happen about which we would like God to do something and he does not do it. Then we feel our mother Eve's compulsion to do something rather than watch God seemingly do nothing because he seemingly doesn't even see what is happening.
- The chapter teaches that God not only sees he hears as well when we may have concluded he is not listening so we are on our own to DO something.
- God himself names the boy Ishmael that means nothing less than **"God hears!"**
- Go back to Sarai and Abram with this boy named Ishmael. Every time his name is spoken—every time he is called into supper—every time—Sarai and Abram and Hagar will hear—**"God hears!"**
- So, if God hears our cries for help and answers and salvation and even success for his plan—we don't ever have to grab the wheel and do our human doings because we think our prayers have gone unheard.
- The naming continues to teach in 13. Hagar, having been found by God when her DOING anything to help was impossible realizes that even when she may feel left to her own devices—God is watching—God sees. So she names the Lord—the messenger who has saved her in her helpless estate—**"El roi"**—that is, **"The God who sees me"**

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- She has seen the God who sees her. This is who God is—he is the God who sees even when it feels to humans he may not actually be looking at what is going on in their lives.
- How important was this lesson? The well where Hagar saw the SEEING God was still there at ***Beer Lahai Roi***, 4 centuries later as the Israelites were about to fulfill that next step of the promise.
- God is the God who sees—even if it takes 400 years for him to do what clearly shows he always sees.
- Of course, I will not likely live 400 years and, sorry to tell you, neither will you. So with that reality in mind we can either believe God is something—that is God is the God who sees--
- -- Or perhaps as I often do, we can decide we must **do** something because doing anything is better than doing nothing while trusting that God sees even when I can't see.
- Abram **believed** the LORD and it was credited to him as righteousness.
- ***Now here is why I told you when I stated that this is one of the most difficult chapters in Genesis for me to teach.*** Remember, I've admitted to you I have the same inherited human impulse.
- We have heard the truth about our human doing and the mess it can make when not built solely upon the reality of God's being—who God is.
- We have heard the truth that God sees—he sees our struggles with sin, our family issues and heartaches, our sicknesses and our sadness, and our helplessness. He sees our confusion and our pain. He sees our strengths and our weaknesses.
- As a church, he sees our desires to serve him—he sees the desires of our leaders to do something right and good for him and his plan in

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the decisions we are making about how to be **FBC 3.0** going forward.

He sees all of this **and** he hears all of our prayers as well.

- He has told us over and over and over in his word **who he is**—who he will always be one month or four hundred years from now.
- He has told us to trust him for all of this truth—he has even told us that he will rightly and honestly call that believing him alone, our **"righteousness."**
- Here is the difficulty—I feel it even now welling up inside of me. It is that question I can never quite seem to escape. I would bet some of you are feeling it rise up as well.
- **OK Raleigh—fine—good enough—BUT what should I DO??!!**