

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: *Mister, She's My Sister: Part Two*

Text: Genesis 20:1-18

RGGJR/FBCCS/7-4-21 UNEDITED

- When one first reads it, chapter 20 of *Genesis* may sound a bit like Moses has given us a chapter of "*the same song second verse.*"
- Thinking back to chapter 12, you'll remember that is where Moses records the promise to Abram that he, and the *nation* his family will become, will be blessed by the LORD in order to be a blessing. The promise was, "***...all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.***"
- With these wonderful promises of God in his possession, Abram left Haran heading south to the land of Canaan—the Promised Land. As he walked this promised territory from north to south and east to west, he performed ***priestly*** work. He built an *altar* in the hills between Bethel and Ai and *called upon the name of the LORD*.
- "***Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.***" The Negev is the dry desert territory in the south of Israel. Depending on who is describing it, this area can make up as much as half of the territory of the Promised Land. The Negev sometimes is a place of testing and wandering for the Israelites.
- In this earlier chapter, as Abram moves toward the south—toward the Negev with the promises of God now his, there was a severe famine. Abram, wanting to feed his family, decided to take them further south into the land of Egypt where, I guess, he had heard reports of food being available.
- Recall now, that before they crossed into the land of Egypt, Abram asked his wife Sarai to do him a favor. He asked her to present herself to the Egyptians as his sister rather than his wife.
- He did this because he calculated that her beauty would make her desirable to Egyptian men who then would want to marry her. If they knew she was Abram's wife, they evidently would need to kill Abram to marry Sarah properly in Egypt.

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: *Mister, She's My Sister: Part Two*

Text: Genesis 20:1-18

RGGJR/FBCCS/7-4-21 UNEDITED

- The reality was that this was a convenient ½ truth. Sarah was Abram's ½ sister as well as his whole wife.
- Abram covered up the truth a bit in order to deceive the Egyptians. He did it out of admitted fear—fear of losing his life.
- By that time in the story of *Genesis*, we have a sense that one avenue of attack on God's plan and promises will be directed at the human reproduction of the lineage of humans who will ultimately fulfill the promise that was hinted at in Genesis 3:15 when the LORD God promised the serpent that the seed of the woman would crush his head—would ultimately defeat him.
- We, of course know now that seed—that human born through that lineage—would be Jesus of Nazareth—the Christ of God—the Son of God.
- Abram's **fear** for his own life, here in Egypt as he is running from the test of a life-threatening famine, puts Sarah at risk which puts the chosen lineage of the victorious seed at risk.
- Abram may be a **virtual king** by the indisputable authority of the LORD God over all the Promised domain he has just crisscrossed. Abram may be a nascent **priest** building altars and calling on the name of this LORD God. However, Abram is living as a scared—a frightened—king/priest of the LORD God rather than a **courageous conduit** of the blessings of the LORD God through him to bless all the nations of the earth.
- Abram had the wonderful, world-impacting, absolutely certain promises of the LORD God in his pocket but his fear of man made him hide them there.
- What was the result of this fear? Instead of blessing the nation of Egypt, he deceived the nation and caused them to suffer from serious diseases. In the end, God still used the nation of Egypt to

bless Abram but Abram failed to bless Egypt as the promises provided.

- Now, in chapter 20, we get the same "***Mister, She's Just My Sister!***" song but this time it's the second verse. AND, the second verse advances the story of "***Mister, She's Just My Sister!***"
- Let's read it in *Genesis 20*. It begins with that same move to the south. **READ Genesis 20:1-18**
- ***Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, <sup>2</sup> and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.***
- There is the repeated chorus of the same song up front. Abram, now known as Abraham, moves south toward the Negev and sings, "*Mister, she's my sister.*"
- ***<sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."***
- Does it strike us as interesting that God is speaking in dreams to this City-State King? In this context it should. What sort of guy is this Abimelech living here in the southern part of the Promised Land that an appeal by God to moral custom and strict judgment might work? Is he the type of man Abraham expects that has made him so afraid to be the conduit of blessing he is supposed to be? Let's see.
- ***<sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? <sup>5</sup> Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."***
- "*I haven't touched this other man's wife!*" I wouldn't be in this deadly predicament if that Abraham hadn't lied to me—well at least

*deceived me with partial truth. My hands and conscience are clean— Abraham is the sinner here!"*

- ***6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. 7 Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."***
- Wow! God is having a full blown dream conversation with this King Abimelech. He is communicating with him in meaningful ways about matters not mundane. It feels to me a bit like he spoke to Abraham through the story.
- God has PROACTIVELY protected Abimelech from a sin of ignorance since he truly was not choosing to sin against the LORD. As a result, Sarah has remained safe as the seed bearing mother she will indeed be.
- But, now that God has shown this protective mercy, the requirement is to repent of the wrong done in ignorance or face the devastating personal and corporate consequences of the LORD's judgment.
- Please look again at how the LORD identifies Abraham to Abimelech here. ***"Return the man's wife for he is a (what?) a prophet..."***
- What does it mean that Moses is a "*prophet*?" This designation seems rather emphatic and is meant to carry some weight in the argument the LORD makes not to touch the man's wife.
- Moses knows exactly what it means. As he records his own story in Exodus 6 and 7 this is what he wrote: ***28 Now when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt, 29 he said to him, "I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you." 30 But Moses said to the Lord, "Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" 7Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh,***

**and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. <sup>2</sup> You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.**

- Then in Numbers 12:6 The LORD says **"Listen to my words: When a prophet of the LORD is among you I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams."**
- A "prophet" is the authoritative messenger of the LORD God's words. He is God's "mouth" for human ears telling them God's words.
- If one has any sense that this LORD God is real and powerful, one ought to pay attention to his prophet not hurt his prophet. Abimelech seems to believe this and understand this.
- Can you see the obvious twist here? Abraham is the prophet who was meant to hear the dreams and to speak the words of the LORD God to bless the people—eventually the nations with truth. Instead Abimelech is hearing God and blessing Abraham and his own people with truth.
- Why? Because Abraham, the frightened king/priest of the LORD is also a frightened prophet of the LORD. Abraham's fears about his circumstances and about Abimelech the city-King keep him from serving God to fulfill the promises as the LORD's prophet—priest—and king.

- What sort of man was Abimelech? What were the people of his city like? Look at verse 8 and following: **<sup>8</sup> Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. <sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done."**  
**<sup>10</sup> And Abimelech asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"**

- Abimelech didn't waste much time before publicly repenting from a sin of ignorance. And, with their roles reversed, he serves prophetically by asking Abraham why he has behaved this way—why rather than blessing the city-kingdom of Gerar, he has instead nearly cursed them to death by judgment from God with his deception?
- Abraham answers with a confession that teaches the generation about to enter the Promised Land, including the Negev, in verse 11 and following <sup>11</sup> ***Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'*** <sup>12</sup> ***Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife.*** <sup>13</sup> ***And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother." ' "***
- Abraham had concluded in his own thinking that all the people of this Promised Land would be God-rejecting, wife-stealing, murderers. This Abimelech has sure made a mess of his self-reasoned generalization—proven it wrong.
- So brave in some ways, Abraham carries great fear in other ways. AND, the lesson is that human fear can block the people of God from being the conduit of God's promises.
- What was the source of Abraham's conduit-blocking fear? It lies in those words, ***"I said to myself."*** Abraham relied on his limited human perception of the circumstances and that made him afraid. That caused him to compromise the truth and limit his ability to be a blessing because of God's blessing on him.
- It is almost as if Abimelech "rubs it in a bit" when it comes to Abraham's failure due to his human –based fear. Look at verse 14 and following please...<sup>14</sup> ***Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle***

***and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. <sup>15</sup> And Abimelech said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like." <sup>16</sup> To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."***

- Abimelech who has served as the prophet to the fearful prophet now serves as the "blesser" to the fearful "blesser."
- One way or another God will fulfill his promises. He will carry out his perfect plan. Abimelech further enriches Abraham. He returns Sarah untouched. He then, makes the magnanimous gesture of a sort of "*mi casa es tu casa*"—"live wherever you like in what is my territory" statement.
- I don't know what Abimelech understood about all of this but for a man whose title "*avi-meleck*" proclaims publicly that he is the "father of kings," maybe this was as much as he could humble himself before Abraham.
- We will see some more of how this works out a bit later in chapter 21 when "*avi-meleck*" (father of kings) says to Abraham: "***God is with you in everything you do so please don't ever deal falsely with me or my descendants again!***" Once you have compromised out of human fear, it is hard to live down that reputation in front of a watching world.
- Abimelech also seems to sense something of what is at stake in this near potential corruption of Sarah's lineage bearing role. He wants all to know that Sarah has done nothing wrong. He has not touched her. No coming child will be anyone's but Abraham's as far as he is concerned.

- Abimelech "puts his money where his mouth is" in this proclamation. He warrants it publicly with a great deal of money. It seems the greater the value of the warrant, the more certain folks were that someone was telling the truth they were warranting.
- Once again God mercifully works through imperfect Abraham to accomplish his plan. Look at the last few verses beginning at verse 17 ***17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, 18 for the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah.***
- Abraham gets to be the pipeline of blessing. By God's grace alone, through prayer, Abraham gets to participate in the glory of fixing a mess he has made.
- Before I close by asking us what this passage says to a people of God who are constituted to bless the nations with the blessing of God, let me make the closing point Moses uses as a transition to the next chapter.
- A special birth is coming—a promised birth. I'm not sure that next generation of Israelites to whom Moses was writing would forget a truth about how babies are made as easily as we do—but maybe they were.
- How are babies made? God makes every single one of them! Moses makes it clear that God is in absolute control of baby making. God closed the wombs and then opened the wombs of not some of the women of the household of Abimelech but of all of them.
- In chapter 21 a baby is coming from God to two old, parents who have waited and waited. They may participate but ultimately, God will bless Abraham and Sarah with Isaac.

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: *Mister, She's My Sister: Part Two*

Text: Genesis 20:1-18

RGGJR/FBCCS/7-4-21 UNEDITED

- I did a brief survey from all of the trustworthy sources on the "interweb" concerning what the world considers the impact of fear to be. I think these folks got it mostly right. They suggested that ultimately the problem with fear is that, real or imagined, fear can take over a person's life!
- Ultimately, either **faith** or **fear** can be in control of one's life but both cannot be in control at the same time. I recognize we often don't experience this as an either/or reality. Instead we try to trust God and live by faith even when we still may have some emotions caused by fear.
- However, the time will come maybe quickly—maybe after years—when faith or fear will dominate us. I think this is why the Bible has so much to say about not being fearful—not letting one's self become dominated by fears based on human assessments of circumstances.

### **Isaiah 41:10**

*"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

### **Psalm 23:4**

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

### **Psalm 27:1**

*"The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?"*

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: *Mister, She's My Sister: Part Two*

Text: Genesis 20:1-18

RGGJR/FBCCS/7-4-21 UNEDITED

## **2 Timothy 1:7**

*"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."*

## **John 14: 27**

*Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid."*

- You could cite 50 more verses that tell us we don't have to be afraid because God is our trustworthy God and he will never fail—he will never forsake us. WE are called to trust Him. Yet sometimes we still *feel* fear personally and collectively.
- Personally, I felt fear when Mary was diagnosed with cancer. I began to consider what MIGHT come. What might the future be like without her? I think that fear could have overwhelmed me except for the Spirit reminding me of the truth that Jesus taught his disciples that none of us can add a single hour to our lives by worrying about what is yet to come? Doing that only produces fear and dwelling on that allows fear to take over control rather than faith.
- So my personal struggle now is to "take captive" the thoughts that I somehow can know the future. I cannot. If I can't know it, I have chosen not to worry about it. Sometimes I must consciously say "stop thinking about the future" so that worry doesn't allow fear to grow.
- More importantly, I think we need to recognize that collectively today, as a body—as the church called FBC—we are called to be the conduit of God's blessing in Jesus Christ to the people around us and to the world.

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: *Mister, She's My Sister: Part Two*

Text: Genesis 20:1-18

RGGJR/FBCCS/7-4-21 UNEDITED

- Fellowship Bible Church does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the world God loves and wants to redeem through us.
- Collectively, fear can plug up that conduit of redemptive blessing. So, just as I had to ask myself what produced personal fear about Mary's cancer, I also have asked myself what seems sometimes to produce collective fear in FBC these days.
- I think the answer is, once again, when we think we know or are supposed to figure out the exact future for this church and thus control things so we make the exact right decisions in order to make that future happen.
- We can't do that. We can think, and plan and pray and decide but we can't know for sure and that seems to makes some of us afraid we will make a mistake.
- The strange thing is, for me, the more I try to get that right the more I worry and then, the more I become afraid. And, as it is with an individual, fear and faith cannot be controlling us at the same time.
- As with Abraham and later with Israel, if fear takes over collective control, then our role as a conduit of blessing will be reduced or even blocked. AND, it doesn't take many fearful members of a community to make fear a controlling force in that community. It doesn't require that everyone be afraid—just a few of us. Fear is that powerful against faith.
- Individually, I am convinced that God will do what is truly the best thing for Mary and me as we trust him. Collectively, I am convinced that God will do what is truly best for FBC if we will trust him.
- I recognize that the "truly best thing" for God's purposes may not be what I want or want I expect in either case.
- I am going to ask you all not to be afraid about FBC's future but rather to trust that God will give us the truly best thing. It may not be

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: *Mister, She's My Sister: Part Two*

Text: *Genesis 20:1-18*

RGJR/FBCCS/7-4-21 **UNEDITED**

what you want or expect but God never promised you that so don't be afraid that you won't get it!

- Let's not be afraid we will miss out as FBC because we don't know the future perfectly. For which of us can add a single hour to our life by worry that causes fear or which of us can be absolutely certain we will get the next step for FBC right by worry or by fear? We cannot!
- As a community called to bless this city and the world beyond, God is calling us to faith—to trust him—he will let us be a part of that when we trust him. God is **not** calling us to fear that we will make a mistake. That fear will keep us from faith and from our mission of redemptive blessing.