

SUNDAY, JULY 18, 2010

Sunday, July 18, 2010: Whom Do You Trust?

Whom Do You Trust?
Genesis 21: 1 – 7

I. Introduction.

Trust is a scarce commodity in today's world. We have a hard time trusting other people. And, often, we understand when other people don't trust us.

Take for example some of the biggest issues facing our nation today...

I don't want to encourage a political debate...But there are many voices today insisting there is a health care crisis in the United States. Ultimately the health care crisis comes down to the question: Can we trust the health insurance companies to do the right thing? This year, our church has to pay 36% more for health insurance than we did last year. I don't think we can trust the health insurance companies. But, can we trust the government to fix it?

Or think about the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. One of the lessons the oil spill teaches us is that we cannot trust giant corporations to oversee the safety of their employees. 11 men died when the Deepwater Horizon collapsed. And we cannot trust corporations to take expensive precautions to protect the environment.

We witnessed the same thing when Toyota finally recalled millions of cars as a result of an acceleration problem. Low production costs are more important than expensive safety precautions.

But, can we trust the government to regulate the oil industry or the automobile industry?

What about the stock market? Can we trust the stock market? I can remember several families in our church in Mississippi who trusted the stock market so much that they were able to retire before they reached 65. Then, in 2001, the stock market dropped after the terrorist attacks. Some of these people had to go back to work.

What about other people? Can we trust the people who live in our community? I can't speak for you, but I always lock the doors of my house and my truck. I'm glad we have law enforcement in Lufkin and Angelina County. Because, when we live around people we do not trust, it is necessary to have someone to enforce the rules. When we live with people we trust, enforcing rules is not as important. Relationship is more important than rules for the people we trust the most.

There are two sides to trust. On one hand, we must offer trust to other people in our lives. On the other hand, those people must prove themselves trustworthy...worthy of our trust. The only way to prove yourself trustworthy is to tell the truth and make good on all your promises.

There is only one person who has proven himself worthy of our trust. God is worthy of our trust. I remember a sign on a tire store in Tupelo, Mississippi that reads, "In God we trust...All others must pay cash."

Read Genesis 21: 1 – 7.

This is the story we have been waiting for over the past ten weeks. Ten weeks ago, we read the first Abraham story in Genesis 12. In these ten weeks, we have followed 25 years of Abraham's life.

In Genesis 12, Abraham was 75 years old. In Genesis 21, Abraham is 100 years old. I have to be careful with my words at this point, because I don't want to give you the impression that 75 is old. 75 is not old...But, 75 is just a little bit older than we think of when we think of a man receiving a promise that God will make him a father in the next 25 years.

These 25 years were filled with ups and downs for Abraham. On one hand, Abraham is our example. He is the model for what it means to live a life faithful to God. On the other hand, Abraham doesn't fare well in his first 25 years in the Promised Land.

God made a promise to Abraham that he would have a son, and that one day Abraham's descendants would be so numerous that they could not be counted. But, Abraham did not always trust in God's promise. On at least two occasions, Abraham took matters into his own hands. He lied to Pharaoh in Egypt and Abimelech in Gerar by telling them Sarah was his sister, not his wife. He did this because he trusted more in his own ability to protect his life than in God's ability to fulfill his promise.

On two other occasions, Abraham made contingency plans. He wanted to have a backup plan just in case God couldn't keep his promise. Just in case God could not give Abraham an heir, Abraham planned to adopt his slave Eliezer to become his son. Just in case God could not allow Sarah to conceive a son, Abraham broke his marriage vows and took Hagar as a second wife. Abraham and Hagar had a son named Ishmael. But God rejected both of Abraham's back up plans.

There were even two occasions when Abraham and Sarah laughed in God's face. Abraham laughed at God in Genesis 17. Sarah laughed at God in Genesis 18.

These 25 years were filled with doubt, disbelief, sin and laughing at God's promises. Abraham and Sarah did NOT deserve to have this child. This child is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. This child is not the result of Abraham's exemplary life.

Perhaps that is why Genesis 21: 1 begins with the phrase, "Now the LORD was gracious..." This is what Grace really is. Grace is a gift from God, which no one deserves. I have heard this all my life, so I assume you have heard it as well. Mercy is when we do not receive what we deserve. But, Grace is when we receive something we do not deserve.

Therefore, Abraham is our example of faith...Not so much for what he does... But Abraham is our example in the way God dealt with him. God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham lived a life of doubt, disbelief, sin and laughing at God. Abraham did nothing to deserve God's promises. But, that did not stop God from showing his Grace to Abraham.

The same thing is true for you. God sent his Son Jesus to fulfill the entire Law of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled the Law for us, because we could not fulfill it on our own. Then, Jesus demonstrated God's love for us by becoming the final sacrifice for our sins. We don't deserve this love. In fact, it's just the opposite. We are sinners. Perhaps we can even say we are just like Abraham, living in doubt, disbelief, sin and laughing at God's promises.

However, notice what Abraham did when God fulfilled his promise. Abraham demonstrated his obedience by doing exactly what God had commanded him to do.

II. Abraham's Obedience.

Abraham demonstrated obedience in two ways. He gave his child the name Isaac, and he circumcised Isaac on the eighth day.

The name Isaac is important to the story in at least two ways. First, the Hebrew name Isaac (literally, Yitzhak) is a form of the Hebrew word "laughter." It is a reminder that both Abraham and Sarah laughed when God told them they would have a child in their old age. Second, God told Abraham in Genesis 17 to name his son Isaac. He wasn't to name him Abraham, Junior or anything else. And, Abraham obeyed God.

Circumcision is also important in the Abraham story. There was nothing magical or mysterious about circumcision. It was simply a sign. It was the sign that Abraham had entered into a covenant relationship with God. Now, it is a sign that Abraham would rear his son, Isaac, in the same covenant relationship.

Again, Abraham serves as an example for us. Salvation is a Grace gift from God. God offers it to us. We receive this gift through faith. However, that is not the end. Once we receive God's gift, God wants to change our lives.

Faith is not the sum total of the Christian life. Faith is simply the beginning. At the moment of faith, God begins a work in us to change our lives. God's desire for your life is that you and I would live differently from the rest of the world. God's standards were later codified for us in the Ten Commandments. These commandments are God's expectations for us. God has high expectations for you and me.

Sin might be the norm for the rest of the world. But, God gives us his Holy Spirit to strengthen us in order to resist sin and temptation.

Lying might be a way of life for the rest of the world. But, God calls Christians to live by a standard that is higher than the standards of the world.

Stealing might be overlooked by the world. But, God expects us to live differently...Even when everyone would understand...

Sexual immorality might be acceptable for non-Christians. But, that is not the way God wants us to live.

Men and women who live in a covenant relationship with God are supposed to be different. Non-Christians do not live by God's standards. And Christians are not supposed to live like non-Christians. We live in obedience to the one we trust.

III. God Can Be Trusted.

The story in Genesis 21 is an important story. We know it is important, because we have been

waiting for this moment for 25 years. Well, Abraham has been waiting for 25 years; you and I have been waiting for ten weeks. Everything in Abraham's story has been leading up to this moment in time.

However, there is something almost anticlimactic about this story. God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. Then, the book of Genesis gives us an incredibly detailed account of all the good and the bad leading up to the fulfillment of the promise. The buildup lasts from Genesis 12 – Genesis 20 (215 verses of Scripture). Then, the fulfillment happens in just seven verses...Seven verses.

Usually, we like to celebrate when something good happens. Like when our team wins the big game. We were living in Waco when the Baylor women's basketball team won the NCAA national championship. The town went nuts. There were celebrations in the Ferrell Center, and there was a parade. The team was invited to the White House to meet with the president of the United States. It was a big deal. And a lot of people made a big deal out of it. (But, I don't remember any riots in the streets of Waco or people setting cars on fire like they do in other cities.)

The birth of Isaac is a bigger deal than a college basketball team winning the national championship. Think about it. This is a miraculous birth—a baby was born to a 100 year old father and a 90 year old mother. This birth marks the beginning of Abraham's people—Isaac was the heir of all of Abraham's wealth, AND he was the heir through which God would bless all peoples of the earth. This birth is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham—a promise that was 25 years in the making.

So, where is the parade? Did Abraham and Sarah get invited to the White House? Did people celebrate in the streets and burn their cars?

There was no parade and no hoopla when Isaac was born, because this is different. When God keeps his word, it's not that big of a deal. When God fulfills his promises, it's not unusual. That's the way God is. He makes promises and keeps his promises. It's not like when a human being keeps his word. Now, that is something to celebrate and march in a parade. But, not when God keeps his word...Because God can be trusted.

When God makes a promise, he fulfills it. It might take 25 years of waiting. It might take an entire lifetime of waiting. But God always keeps his word. And we should never be surprised when God does what he told us he would do.

Genesis 21: 2, “Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.”

This verse tells us a three important things about God's promises.

First, “Sarah became pregnant and bore a son” indicates that God often works through the natural order. Isaac did not appear as a full grown man. Sarah conceived and went through nine months of pregnancy, labor and delivery.

Second, “bore a son to Abraham in his old age” tells us this was no ordinary conception and pregnancy. God did the miraculous by accomplishing what no one thought was possible. Nothing is impossible for God. Nothing can stand in the way of God's promises. God can and will overcome all obstacles to keep his word to you.

Third, “at the very time God had promised him” reminds us that God told Abraham in Genesis 18 that Isaac would be born one year later. This is probably not the time Abraham and Sarah would have chosen for God to fulfill his promise. They probably would have preferred that Isaac be born 75 years ago! God works on his own time...But God is always on time.

IV. Conclusion: God’s Promises.

What promises has God made to you?

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus died on the cross to offer us forgiveness for our sins. God sent his Holy Spirit to be present with all who believe. God promises to begin the work of sanctification in your life to make your character more and more like the character of Jesus. God promised to give you the strength to resist temptation and a “way out” when temptation becomes more than you can handle. God promised to give you an abundant life—a life of joy and excitement even in the face of evil and suffering. God promised to give you eternal life in his presence in Heaven.

These are BIG promises. But, they are not too BIG for God to fulfill. It may not happen when we want it to happen...But, we should not be surprised when God keeps his word.