

# **Genesis 20, The Beginning of Hope in the Promises of God: A Life of Abraham,** Preached by Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008

## **Intro**

Today we are in a flashback since we flashed forward last week, and saw what Abraham's life would look like some 12-15 years later. We saw his faith tested and expanded by Yahweh, as he demonstrated that he had grown in his love for God, and his desire to please Him above all (Or everyone) else. We find Abraham years before struggling much like we do with the desires of our heart that often derails our intimacy with Christ. We continue to hold on to desires and "Loves" and idols that we don't want to repent of, then we are discouraged by "Feeling" distant from God. God wants to remove these cancerous cells that can often grow into huge maladies that either require radical surgery or our ultimate death. It is these moments of "Heat" that reveal our condition, and require us to repent and turn to the only real hope we have in a meaningless world; Jesus Christ, and His cross.

In our story today, we see a repeat performance of Abraham's sin in Egypt (See **Genesis 12:9-20**). Some see this as the same story (Folklore) repeated again for effect, but I don't think so. The circumstances are similar, but not the same. They both take place in the "Negev" (South Region), but the chapter 12 story is dealing with Pharaoh and God's control over him and his gods, this story is in "Gerar" (The area of the Philistines; Gaza Strip). The Negev often refers to an area that is not the "Promised Land." It is a real place, but it is representative of a cross-cultural experience that we can often be trapped by if we are not shrewd in our approach. We are not sure why Abraham journeyed down there after the ordeal with Sodom and Gomorrah, but there are parallels to both stories. In both stories women are not protected, and they are exploited for the man's safety, and in each story, and in each story we see a questioning of God's justice. Both stories reflect something of God's heart, when it comes to sexual and bullying exploitation. In God's economy, the strong may survive, but they won't get away with it!

Let's take a look at our passage, and it's meaning for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

## **From the Head...**

Right away we have a very interesting revelation of God to Ambimelech (The Pagan Philistine) in a dream. This helps us understand the mission of God in this world a bit. Does God need His "herald" to proclaim His word? I would answer no to that. God can and does reveal Himself to non-believers in methods outside of the normative. Abraham is his herald (**Genesis 20:7**), and not doing a very good job of it. God can and does act sovereignly in spite of us. The fact is, God is trying to spare Ambimelech from judgment, and does so in a dream. Scripture reminds us that God is restraining evil, and His judgment from what it could be (See **2 Thessalonians 2: 6-7**), and He is blessing those that are his and those that are His enemies (See **Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:16-17**). God is good, and He is gracious, merciful and fair, and holds His judgment until the time is ready for the person(s) to be judged (See **Genesis 15:16**).

This whole situation is strange. Ambimelech, along with his military commander would have made for an intimidating encounter, and kings of this nature would have had a Harem that they were always looking to increase, as a sign of their power and virility. It is interesting that Ambimelech sees himself as a man of integrity. It goes to show that morality is often culturally constructed, and leads most often to a proud heart. How many people use sexually sin, steal from their employer by not working hard, take God's name in vain, etc. and feel that they are "Good people?" We all judge ourselves like Ambimelech. We're not that bad!

God reminds him quickly in verse six that it wasn't the integrity of his heart that saved him, but God saved him, and he needs to acknowledge that. When we create a self-righteousness in our minds, we really don't need God to fulfill it. We begin to believe that we are righteous because we fulfill some cultural mores, but have no idea how wicked our heart can be.

Ambimelech awakes and lets his people in on what happened and they feared what could happen to them. What's interesting is Ambimelech apologizes for "Sinning" against Abraham, without realizing that his real sin is against God (See verse 6). He is worried about what Abraham might do to him, but not aware of whom his god is. Ambimelech reminds Abraham of what he did though to bring this on. Abraham is God's prophet, but he has clearly sinned before God, Sarah, Ambimelech and his people.

Abraham's reasons are weak. First he thought that "There was no fear of God in this place." While his recent experience in Sodom didn't help, this is often the case for many believers who don't know what to do with culture, and assume that it is somehow more evil that they are. We are often surprised to find out that the "Heathens" are more gracious and moral than we are. It is a false understanding of the gospel to think that those people "Out there" are any worse or different than us. This is the result of the moralistic gospel often proclaimed from our pulpits, but it has nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ, which saves us in spite of our self.

Secondly, he justifies his sin by referring to a half-truth, which is a justification we all do. We tell ourselves it's ok because we are able to justify our actions with deception. His third justification is a subtle blaming of God, who "caused" him to wander from his father's house. Doesn't this all sound familiar? We blame the world, our spouses (Other people) and God, but hardly take the blame on ourselves, and our own hard heart. We get frustrated at God and others when we are hurt in a relationship, but we don't want to do what's right in those relationships. We want to live the way we want, but get frustrated at the consequences.

Ambimelech, in order to clear his name and guilt, pays off Abraham, and gives Sarah an "Expiation" offering. This is literally a "Covering" to show her innocence before her people. If she went into Ambimelech, she would have brought shame on herself, and her people, but this offering covers any guilt in the eyes of others.

### **...to the Heart**

Abraham was protecting himself or the promise. Either way he was trying to save himself on his own terms, and failed to trust God, and allowed his fear of man dominate his relationship with God and his wife. He often stumbled because of this fear, whether or not it was a fear of man, or a fear of his wife, he wasn't able to be bold when he needed to be, because he was trying to protect some very dear things in his mind, and he feared giving them over to God. Abraham trusted his flesh instead of trusting his God. Walking with God is impossible except for the sovereignty of God in our life, and the work of the cross of Jesus Christ, who is the covering (Expiation) and propitiation for our sins. Below are some key truths that we can learn from our text today, and remember that nothing is possible apart from God's work in our life through the cross of Jesus!

1. Sometime sin that we thought we defeated still resides at the recesses of our heart.
2. That God does and can talk to non-believers without the aid of His "Prophets"
3. God's mercy does extend to all people
4. God uses us in spite of our sins
5. Our sin comes as a result of us fearing man more than we fear God.

**Books for further study:** *Genesis*, Walter Brueggemann, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis*, Gordon J. Wenham, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, John H. Walton, *Creation and Blessing*, Allen P. Ross

**Next Weeks Verses:** Genesis 21

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