

“NECESSARY LOSSES”

A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF GENESIS (21:8-21) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON JUNE 21, 2020----- (THE THIRD SUNDAY OF A SIX WEEK SERMON SERIES THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF THE MAJOR THEMES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS)

THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT YOU HAVE OR HAVE SEEN ONE OR MORE COPIES OF THE CHICKEN SOUP BOOKS.... WHAT STARTED OUT AS ONE BOOK OF INSPIRATIONAL STORIES DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE US, HAS NOW TURNED INTO A HUGE SERIES OF BOOKS. NOW....EVERYONE NEEDS ENCOURAGEMENT.

THE POPULARITY OF THESE BOOKS SHOW US THAT MANY PEOPLE AROUND US ARE CRYING OUT FOR SOMEONE TO UNDERSTAND THEM AND LOVE THEM.

AT TIMES IT IS EASY TO FORGET THAT THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN TO INSTRUCT AND ENCOURAGE US.... THE APOSTLE PAUL TELLS US THAT THE ACCOUNTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WERE RECORDED SO THAT WE COULD LEARN FROM THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US....SOMETIMES I HAVE TO REMIND MYSELF OF THIS FACT AND THIS WEEK IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES.

THIS MORNING WE ARE TOLD THAT ABRAHAM HOSTED A GATHERING IN CELEBRATION OF THE WEANING OF HIS SON, ISAAC. WE DON'T SEE ANYWHERE ELSE THAT THIS IS THE COMMON PRACTICE..... SO, THIS WAS A SPECIAL CELEBRATION.... IT MAY HAVE BEEN THAT ISAAC WAS TWO OR THREE YEARS OLD AT THIS TIME. THROUGH OTHER REFERENCES IN GENESIS WE CAN DEDUCE THAT ISHMAEL WOULD HAVE BEEN ABOUT 14 WHEN ISAAC WAS BORN. SO, AT THE TIME OF THIS "WEANING PARTY" ISHMAEL WAS 16 OR 17 YEARS OLD.

DURING THE PARTY ISHMAEL BEGAN MOCKING ISAAC. ANY OF US WHO HAVE CHILDREN DON'T FIND THIS HARD TO BELIEVE..... BUT IT UPSETS SARAH..... IT APPEARS VERY MUCH SO FOR ALL WE KNOW THERE HAD BEEN A RISING TENSION EVER SINCE ISAAC WAS BORN.... MAYBE SARAH FELT OR PERCEIVED A DIVIDED LOYALTY IN ABRAHAM'S HEART..... PERHAPS SHE THOUGHT HE LOVED ISHMAEL MORE THAN ISAAC . . . WE DON'T KNOW..... ALL WE DO KNOW IS WHAT SARAH SAID, "GET RID OF THAT SLAVE WOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THAT SLAVE WOMAN'S SON WILL NEVER SHARE IN THE INHERITANCE WITH MY SON ISAAC." (V. 10).

SARAH PUTS ABRAHAM IN A HORRIBLE SITUATION. THE WIFE HE LOVES IS ASKING HIM TO SEND HIS SON, WHO IS ALMOST A MAN, AWAY. NO MATTER HOW SPECIAL ISAAC WAS, ISHMAEL STILL HELD A SPECIAL PLACE IN HIS FATHERS HEART. ABRAHAM IS IN A VERY HARD SITUATION.

THIS BRINGS US TO OUR FIRST LESSON OF THE DAY: LIFE IS SOMETIMES HARD. LIFE IS OFTEN ACCOMPANIED WITH PAINFUL SITUATIONS, STRAINED RELATIONSHIPS AND DIFFICULT CHOICES.

SOMETIMES THE DIFFICULTY IS A
CONSEQUENCE OF OUR OWN BEHAVIOR.

**BECAUSE THIS IS OUR THIRD WEEK IN OUR
STUDY OF GENESIS WE ARE WELL AWARE THAT
HAVING A SON BY HAGAR WAS SARAH'S IDEA!
THIS WAS A SITUATION OF HER OWN MAKING.
SHE WAS THE ONE WHO SUGGESTED THAT
ABRAHAM FATHER A CHILD THROUGH HER
SLAVE, HAGAR..... ABRAHAM AND HAGAR
BECAME WILLING PARTICIPANTS IN THIS
ATTEMPT TO "HELP GOD" FULFILL HIS PROMISE.
IT WAS A SINFUL THING TO DO AND NOW THEY
ARE FACING THE CONSEQUENCES.**

**WE KNOW THAT HAGAR DID NOT HELP THINGS.
FROM THE MOMENT SHE KNEW SHE WAS
PREGNANT WE READ THAT SHE "DESPISED"
SARAH. SHE TOOK EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO RUB
SARAH'S NOSE IN THE FACT THAT SHE HAD
GIVEN ABRAHAM WHAT SARAH COULD NOT. SO,
THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH HAGAR IS REAPING
WHAT SHE SOWED TOO.**

***WE ARE CONFRONTED HERE WITH THE PAINFUL
TRUTH THAT THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO
OUR SIN. WE KNOW THAT ABRAHAM'S
HOUSEHOLD FACED TURMOIL FROM THE VERY
MOMENT HAGAR BECAME PREGNANT.***

I SUSPECT PROBLEMS BEGAN FROM THE VERY FIRST NIGHT ABRAHAM STAYED IN HAGAR'S TENT. SIN BRINGS CONSEQUENCES.

NOW, I BELIEVE GOD HAD FORGIVEN ABRAHAM. HE HAD EVEN PROMISED TO BLESS ISHMAEL WHEN SARAH WANTED THEM TO LEAVE ONCE BEFORE.... BUT, THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES REMAIN. THIS IS A FACT THAT WE HAVE TO FACE. WHEN WE SIN AND CONFESS THAT SIN, WE ARE FORGIVEN . . . BUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THOSE CHOICES OFTEN CARRY ON.

- . THE PERSON WHO ENGAGES IN ILLICIT SEX MAY FACE CONSEQUENCES OF DISEASE, PREGNANCY, A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP OR THE GUILT OF HAVING GIVEN AWAY SOMETHING PRECIOUS.**
- . THE PERSON WHO LIES HAS TO TRY TO REBUILD THE TRUST THAT WAS DESTROYED.**
- . THE ONE WHO HABITUALLY ABUSES A SUBSTANCE HAS TO FACE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EFFECT THAT SUBSTANCE HAS ON THEIR BODIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS.**

- . THE PERSON WHO HAS (OR HAD) ABUSIVE PATTERNS WITH THEIR FAMILY WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH ANY KIND OF RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE THEY HAVE ABUSED.**
- . THE PERSON WHO CONSTANTLY FEEDS THEIR MIND WITH PORNOGRAPHY WILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME GETTING AWAY FROM THOSE IMAGES AS THEY SEEK TO LIVE A LIFE OF PURITY.**
- . THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN ENSNARED IN THE INSATIABLE DESIRE FOR MATERIAL THINGS MAY HAVE ENORMOUS DEBT TO PAY OFF.**

**YOU GET THE IDEA, I HOPE. SIN HAS
CONSEQUENCES. SOMETIMES THEY ARE
PAINFUL.**

**BUT SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TIMES ARE NOT A
RESULT OF OUR OWN ACTIONS. HAGAR
ORIGINALLY WAS ONLY BEING AN OBEDIENT
SERVANT. SHE WAS A SLAVE....SLAVES DID
WHAT THEY WERE TOLD.....SHE WAS TOLD TO
TRY TO HAVE A CHILD WITH ABRAHAM AND SHE
DID WHAT SHE WAS TOLD..... AND WHAT ABOUT
ISHMAEL? HE CERTAINLY DIDN'T ASK TO BE
BORN INTO THIS SITUATION.**

WAS IT HIS FAULT THAT HE WAS BORN? SURE HE WAS MOCKING ISAAC, BUT ISN'T THAT NORMAL AT LEAST TO SOME DEGREE..... WASN'T HE JUST PARROTING THE BEHAVIOR HE HAD CERTAINLY SEEN IN HIS MOTHER. SOMETIMES WE ARE INNOCENT PLAYERS IN A TOUGH CIRCUMSTANCE.

CONSIDER SOME EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO ARE IN SITUATIONS THEY HAD LITTLE IF ANYTHING TO DO WITH,

- CHILDREN OF DIVORCE**
- CHILDREN RAISED IN HOMES WHERE THERE IS SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

- . THOSE WHO ARE IN PHYSICALLY ABUSIVE SITUATIONS**
- . THOSE ARE RAISED IN ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND POVERTY**
- . THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM A DEVASTATING ILLNESS OR INJURY THAT THEY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH**
- . THOSE WHO HAVE GENETIC DISORDERS OR DISEASE**
- . THOSE WHO FACE TURMOIL---REJECTION – SPITE AND MISTREATMENT AND INJUSTICE -- --SIMPLY BECAUSE OF RACE OR CREED OR RELIGION.....**

THERE ARE A HOST OF THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN LIFE THAT WE HAVE NOT ASKED FOR OR DESERVED. *SOMETIMES THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE COME UPON US AND WE DON'T KNOW WHY. DIFFICULT TIMES HAPPEN.*

SO ABRAHAM IS CAUGHT IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION.... HE ASKS GOD FOR HELP AND GOD TELLS ABRAHAM TO "SEND HAGAR AND HER SON AWAY." THE WORD FOR "SEND AWAY" MAY HAVE BEEN THE WORD THAT MEANT "GIVE A DIVORCE TO".

GOD SEEMED TO BE TELLING ABRAHAM TO SEVER HIS TIES WITH HAGAR AND WITH HIS FIRSTBORN SON. WHY WOULD GOD COMMAND SUCH AN ACTION?

I DON'T KNOW. GOD MAY HAVE KNOWN THAT THERE WOULD ALWAYS BE CONFLICT. HE MAY HAVE SEEN THAT ISAAC WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SERVE AS HE NEEDED TO IF ISHMAEL WAS AROUND..... MAYBE GOD SAW THAT ABRAHAM'S HEART WAS DIVIDED. BUT . . . THIS IS ALL CONJECTURE ON MY PART.....

THE ONLY WAY OUT OF THIS BAD SITUATION WAS TO MAKE A CLEAN BREAK. AND THAT IS SOMETIMES WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN IN OUR LIVES AS WELL..... BUT IT ISN'T EASY.

WE READ THAT "EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, ABRAHAM TOOK SOME FOOD AND A SKIN OF WATER AND GAVE THEM TO HAGAR. HE SENT HER OFF WITH THE BOY. I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THAT ABRAHAM'S HEART BROKE AS HE WATCHED THEM MOVE INTO THE DESSERT. HOW HORRIBLE IT WAS TO SEE HIS SON WALK OUT OF HIS LIFE. AND THINK ABOUT IT FROM ISHMAEL'S PERSPECTIVE.

THIS IS NOT SOME UNKNOWING INFANT. HE KNOWS VERY WELL THAT HIS FATHER IS SENDING HIM AWAY. THERE MUST HAVE BEEN MANY TEARS. BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON, IT WAS NECESSARY, AND ABRAHAM TRUSTED GOD.

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL WENT ON THEIR WAY AND WANDERED IN THE DESSERT OF BEERSHEBA. WHAT PROBABLY HAPPENED WAS THAT ABRAHAM GAVE AMPLE PROVISIONS FOR SARAH TO GET TO THE NEXT TOWN.... DUE TO SPOILAGE EASTERNERS SELDOM CARRIED MORE THAN THEY NEEDED FOR THEIR JOURNEY.

BUT ON THIS JOURNEY HAGAR AND ISHMAEL MADE A WRONG TURN AND GOT LOST. THE PROVISIONS RAN OUT AND ISHMAEL (WHO WOULD BURN CALORIES AND SWEAT MORE THAN HIS MOM BECAUSE OF HIS AGE), FELT THE EFFECTS OF THE HEAT FIRST. HAGAR, WHO WAS PROBABLY ALREADY QUITE DISTRAUGHT AT HAVING BEEN SENT AWAY, FEELS SHE CANNOT BEAR ANY MORE..... WHILE ISHMAEL LIES IN THE SHADE HAGAR SOBS.

THERE IS NOTHING IN THE TEXT THAT IMPLIES THAT EITHER HAGAR OR ISHMAEL WAS PRAYING. NOTHING THAT SAYS THEY ASKED FOR GOD'S HELP.

**BUT GOD, BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT
ISHMAEL WAS ABRAHAM'S SON, SENDS THE
ANGEL OF THE LORD TO HAGAR. HE
REITERATES THE PROMISE THAT GOD HAD
MADE REGARDING ISHMAEL AND THEN WE ARE
TOLD THAT GOD "OPENED HER EYES AND SHE
SAW A WELL OF WATER."**

**GOD DID NOT MAKE A WELL APPEAR. HE TOOK
THE BLINDNESS FROM HAGAR..... APPARENTLY
THE WELL HAD BEEN THERE ALL ALONG.....
HAGAR IN HER DISTRAUGHT STATE, DIDN'T SEE
IT! GOD WATCHES OVER EVEN THIS ONE WHO
HAD BEEN BORN CONTRARY TO GOD'S WILL.
AND WE READ THAT GOD CONTINUED TO BE
WITH THE BOY.**

**WHAT A GREAT COMFORT TO THOSE WHO FEEL
LIKE THEY ARE CASTAWAY. WHAT A
WONDERFUL MESSAGE TO THOSE WHO FEEL
THAT THEY HAVE BEEN IN SITUATIONS THAT
ARE LESS THAN IDEAL. PERHAPS YOU WERE
BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK, OR ARE PRODUCTS OF
A BROKEN HOME. PERHAPS YOU HAVE BEEN
HELPLESS PLAYERS IN A BAD SITUATION. THE
MESSAGE HERE IS SIMPLE BUT IMPORTANT . . .
GOD SEES YOU AND CARES ABOUT YOU.**

LISTEN TO DAVID'S WORDS,

***THE LORD IS CLOSE TO THE BROKENHEARTED
AND SAVES THOSE WHO ARE CRUSHED IN
SPIRIT (PSALM 34:18)***

DAVID SAYS GOD KEEPS A LIST OF OUR TEARS.

HE KNOWS WHAT IS GOING ON. HE CARES.....

AND THEN THERE ARE THESE WORDS FROM

ISAIAH WHICH WERE CLAIMED BY OUR LORD AS

HIS MISSION IN LIFE,

“THE SPIRIT OF THE SOVEREIGN LORD IS ON ME,

BECAUSE THE LORD HAS ANOINTED ME TO

PREACH GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS

SENT ME TO BIND UP THE BROKENHEARTED, TO

PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE CAPTIVES AND

RELEASE FROM DARKNESS FOR THE

PRISONERS, TO PROCLAIM THE YEAR OF THE

LORD'S FAVOR AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF

OUR GOD, TO COMFORT ALL WHO MOURN,

**AND PROVIDE FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE IN ZION -
- TO BESTOW ON THEM A CROWN OF BEAUTY
INSTEAD OF ASHES, THE OIL OF GLADNESS
INSTEAD OF MOURNING, AND A GARMENT OF
PRAISE INSTEAD OF A SPIRIT OF DESPAIR.”
(ISAIAH 61:1-3)**

**GOD MAY HAVE TOLD ABRAHAM TO SEND
HAGAR AND ISHMAEL AWAY . . . BUT HE DID NOT
ABANDON THEM. THEY MAY NOT HAVE
UNDERSTOOD WHY THINGS HAPPENED THE WAY
THEY DID, BUT THEY WERE NOT ALONE.**

GOD NOT ONLY PROVIDED FOR THE NEEDS OF HAGAR AND ISHMAEL AT THE TIME . . . HE HELPED THEM BUILD A NEW LIFE TOGETHER. ISHMAEL BECAME AN ACCOMPLISHED ARCHER AND AS WE HAVE SEEN BEFORE, HIS DESCENDANTS BECAME THE ARAB NATIONS OF TODAY.

THIS TEXT SCREAMS THAT THERE IS HOPE FOR ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE A SCARRED PAST. YOU MAY SYMPATHIZE WITH HAGAR MORE THAN YOU SYMPATHIZE WITH SARAH..... YOU MAY FEEL MORE LIKE ISHMAEL THAN YOU DO ISAAC IN TERMS OF YOUR SITUATION.

BUT GOD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN YOU. YOU MAY NEED TO MAKE A CLEAN BREAK WITH YOUR PAST AND IT WILL BE HARD. BUT YOU WON'T BE ALONE. TURN TO HIM. HE HAS RESOURCES TO HELP YOU. HE WILL SEE YOU THROUGH.

SO, I ASK YOU WHICH PART OF THE MESSAGE DOES GOD WANT YOU TO HEAR TODAY? ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE WHO FEELS TOSSED ASIDE, REJECTED, UNLOVED? DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE BEEN DISMISSED WITHOUT EVER BEING GIVEN A CHANCE?

ARE YOU A VICTIM IN A BAD SITUATION? IF SO . .
HEAR THE WORDS OF COMFORT IN THIS
PASSAGE..... GOD CARES ABOUT YOU. IT
DOESN'T MATTER HOW OR WHY YOU ARE
WHERE YOU ARE . . . GOD SEES YOU. GOD
LOVES YOU..... AND HE WANTS TO COMFORT
YOU AND CARE FOR YOU. TURN TO GOD
TODAY.....DO NOT DELAY!!

MAYBE YOU ARE ONE WHO IS TRYING TO LIVE IN
BOTH WORLDS. MAYBE YOU, LIKE ABRAHAM,
ARE BEING TOLD TO MAKE A BREAK WITH YOUR
PAST.

MAYBE TODAY IS THE DAY WHEN YOU HAVE TO
SEND THE HAGAR'S OF YOUR LIFE AWAY. THOSE
THINGS THAT KEEP YOU FROM LIVING IN THE
PROMISE MAY NEED TO BE DISPOSED OF. THOSE
THINGS THAT WEIGH YOU DOWN MAY NEED TO
BE SET ASIDE. IT'S HARD . . . BUT IT MAY BE
NECESSARY. LET THEM GO AND ENTRUST THEM
TO GOD.

MAYBE YOU NEEDED TO HEAR THE CLEAR
TEACHING ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF GRACE.
PERHAPS YOU HAVE BEEN UNCERTAIN OF YOUR
STANDING BEFORE GOD.

MAYBE YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING HARD BUT
FEEL YOU ARE STILL VERY FAR AWAY.....
BROTHERS AND SISTERS-----PLEASE HEAR THE
MESSAGE . . . THE WORK HAS ALREADY BEEN
DONE..... CHRIST HAS DONE WHAT WAS
NECESSARY . . . YOUR JOB IS TO RECEIVE IT.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BECOME SOMETHING, YOU
DON'T HAVE TO CHANGE ANYTHING FIRST . . .
YOUR JOB IS TO TAKE HIM AT HIS WORD AND
LET HIM BEGIN THE PROCESS OF
TRANSFORMATION IN YOUR LIFE.

ARE YOU WILLING TO DO THAT THIS MORNING?

ARE YOU WILLING, IN A SIMPLE ACT OF FAITH,

TO TRUST GOD RATHER THAN YOUR OWN

ABILITY? ARE YOU WILLING TO PLACE YOUR

HOPE AND CONFIDENCE IN THE WORK OF JESUS

RATHER THAN THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS? IF

SO, DECLARE THAT FAITH TO GOD TODAY. THE

BIBLE IS CLEAR, "IF YOU BELIEVE ON THE LORD

JESUS CHRIST, YOU WILL BE SAVED."

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT THIS STORY

IN GENESIS COULD LEAD US TO SUCH A LIFE

CHANGING CONCLUSION..... GOD CARES AND HE

HAS SENT CHRIST TO DO FOR US WHAT WE

COULD NOT DO FOR OURSELVES.

THAT'S WHY WE SPEND THE REST OF OUR LIVES
LIVING WITH A SENSE OF GRATITUDE AND
WONDER..... AND THAT'S WHY THIS STRANGE
STORY IS CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL.

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN.....