

Service Transcript 11th May 2021

First half: Steve Lineham

Second half: Mark Reid

Welcome to today's service from Maidstone Road Baptist Church

We come together to worship God – He alone is worthy of our praise and worship

Say these verses from Psalm 145 together

I will exalt you, my God the King;

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;

His greatness no one can fathom.

My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord.

Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

Our great God breaks the power of sin and darkness

brings our chaos back into order

makes the orphan a son and daughter

We sing of our great God in this song

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness – this is amazing grace 4:41

What amazing grace, how can we but sing of Jesus and all that he is to us

935 My Jesus, my Saviour, 5:02

Give an update of the life and times of Logos Hope – the OM ship that Pam I served on

Start with a video that gives an overview of what happened in the life of the ship in 2020

Video Logos Hope 2020 year end rewind 5:00

As Randy said life has been turned upside down for the ship – the ship used to attract large numbers of people, as you may have glimpsed in the video the welcoming of the 9 millionth visitor to Logos Hope. The ship is an amazing catalyst for mission and has been the prompt for many people to go into missions work.

But having large numbers of people come onto the ship is not possible in this Coronavirus world. So the senior leadership have re-evaluated how best to continue to serve God – in the future they will be spending longer in port, building relationships, serving and helping people as they did on Abaco responding to the hurricane, and as they are now doing in St Vincent and the Grenadines bringing relief supplies and helping with the clear up from the volcanic eruption.

27th July ship will go onto St Lucia.

Pray for the ship

Lord God thank you for the OM ships ministry, for the thousands of lives that have been touched in your name.

For it being such a great catalyst for mission.

We pray that you keep the crew safe from Coronavirus;

We pray for wisdom and for your leading for the ship leadership team, Seelan, Ronnie, and the others, for the ports the ship should go to, and for the best way that the ship can give glory to you in the places they visit. Amen

Show another short video from the ship – as you know the strapline for the ship is sharing knowledge, help and hope – this video shares what we mean by hope.

It's somewhat self-indulgent on my part as we know most of the people in the video

Video What is hope 2:00

A bit cheesy but a good prompt – get involved – God may not be calling you to be on Logos Hope – but what is God calling you to do – to step out of your comfort zone to have the opportunity for a deeper experience of God's blessing.

Our next song expresses the call to step out, and gives each of us the opportunity to say we will follow where God leads

Oceans 7:09 - You call me out upon the waters

Reading: Genesis 16 (NIV)

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, 'The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.'

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, 'You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.'

6 'Your slave is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.' Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar; so she fled from her.

7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, 'Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?'

'I'm running away from my mistress Sarai,' she answered.

9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, 'Go back to your mistress and submit to her.' 10 The angel added, 'I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.'

11 The angel of the LORD also said to her:

'You are now pregnant
and you will give birth to a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,
for the LORD has heard of your misery.

12 He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he will live in hostility
towards all his brothers.'

13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me.' 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.

16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Second-Guessing God

KILLING THE CAT?

This was one of a series of ads produced for an American insurance company called Ameriquest a few years ago. It's about our tendency to jump to conclusions about people when we don't have the full picture. In this case a man is trying to rescue his girlfriend's cat from the hot mess it had caused in the kitchen but all she could see was her boyfriend with a kitchen knife holding her moggie by the scruff of the neck!

Jumping to conclusions when we have only part of the picture is something we all do. If we were to take time to think of situations in our own lives, we'd start to remember incidents when we got it wrong about how we thought of someone. Maybe like the person we felt angry about because they were late, only to find out the horrendous day they were having. Or someone we were prejudiced about, even though we know nothing about them.

It's amazing how people base their perceived truth on something less than the full story: and find themselves possibly facing tragedy. During the pandemic we have read many stories of covid deniers and anti vaxxers who vociferously opposed covid measures, only to succumb to the disease. Basing one's actions on incomplete knowledge can lead to tragic or near-tragic situations.

We call it second-guessing which is to **ANTICIPATE OR PREDICT (SOMEONE'S ACTIONS OR THOUGHTS) BY GUESSWORK**. "we have to second-guess what the covid situation will probably be in 6 months time". We then base our actions on that speculation. As we all know from the last 17 months, it can lead us into many dashed hopes.

Last week we saw how Abram at last believed what God promised him about his having a biological son who would be the start of a great nation. I didn't preach on the second half of the chapter, but it's a detailed prophecy of what was going to happen to Abram's offspring so he was left in no doubt how critical his descendants were going to be.

And as he tells Sarai, it all begins to unravel and go wrong. Both made a total mess of God's promise by second-guessing what God meant. We know the end of the story; that God intended His purposes would be achieved through Sarai conceiving.

Abram's Guide To Second-guessing God

So how did Abram get to second-guess God which resulted in him becoming a father by the wrong woman? Let's find out because we can learn something from this. So how do we second-guess God? Well, first of all, we

1. Don't pray and ask God to reveal His will more fully

So, God had made a promise that Abram was to have a biological son. Abram was 85 years old. It's not without the bounds of possibility that a man of that age can father children even though the writer to the Hebrews described Abram as "good as dead." Sarai was 75, way beyond childbearing age and had never conceived anyway. So she comes up with a grand plan for him to father children through taking a concubine, Hagar.

At no point in this chapter did Abram consult God. Neither did Sarai. They just assumed that this was how it was to be done. God had just pulled off an amazing feat for Abram against the kings, but they never asked God to guide them, as to how Abram was to become a father.

If you want to mess up your life, there's a simple way you can do it – leave God out. Don't seek Him don't listen for Him, follow your own instinct. But if you don't want to mess up your life, then spend time with Him, read His word, worship with others, seek to honour and serve Him and always seek to walk in the Spirit. So how else do we second-guess God?

2. Defer to "common sense"

Sarai didn't need to seek God on this as far as she was concerned; there was a ready made solution that was practised by rich lords like Abram in those days - Abram must try to conceive with another woman and offered him Hagar, her Egyptian slave. He was to take her as a concubine to have a child on her behalf. Sounded logical. It was perfectly socially acceptable at that time, to have concubines – wives of lower social status, usually taken in order to produce children on behalf of a wife of higher status who couldn't have them.

It was common sense wasn't it? But it wasn't what God intended, His plan was that Sarai would miraculously conceive; but she and Abram never asked.

Never assume that something is God's will just because everybody does it or it seems like common sense. There are things that are obviously wrong, so avoid. But there are many things that are noble, good and moral, but that's doesn't mean you should be doing them if God has something better for you.

I know so many stories of how God called someone but they didn't follow His call, instead doing something more "sensible". Like the man who believed that God was calling him to join MAF as a flight engineer but his wife wanted the security of the excellent job he had. They had a great life

together, but they always wondered whether they got God's second best. More on that in a minute. So how else can we second-guess God and get things horribly wrong?

3. Ignore the alarm bells

ALARM BELLS

Now when Sarai suggested Abram took Hagar as a concubine, alarm bells should have started ringing. Look at the situation. Abram was a one wife man. He had been married to Sarai for decades. They had no children and he'd shown no desire to take another wife he didn't love as a concubine just so he could have an heir; but was happy to delegate Eliezer of Damascus as his heir.

ALARM BELLS

Perhaps the other alarm bell that should have started ringing was that Hagar was an Egyptian; Sarai may well have acquired her in his disastrous trip to Egypt. Should it have made him think twice?

Perhaps it should. One preacher, Jack Arnold commented "Through Hagar, he went back to Egypt without going back to Egypt." This was going to end in tears too.

SEEKING GOD'S WILL

How much do you seek God's will for your life? We are certainly seeking God's will for our church as the weeks and months unfold before us. There are some things that ring alarm bells that identify things that are not of God – behaviour that the Bible tells us is not of God, words and actions that lack love and grace, words and actions contrary to the good news: unforgiveness, , prophetic words that are untested or unheeded, actions based on worldly values.

ALARM BELLS

When alarm bells ring, get praying! And when Abram had second-guessed and messed up he then committed a further mistake that dropped him further in it. So when you second-guess and mess up, what do you? You....

4. Don't take responsibility

Abram takes Hagar as his concubine and straight away it causes friction between Hagar and Sarai. And who gets the blame – Abram! *'You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.'* It's funny how God is suddenly involved as soon as everything goes wrong because of their mistake! When Christians take wrong actions, it's funny how God is suddenly involved when He wasn't before. It all becomes His fault. Who came up with the idea in the first place? Not God.

And whose idea was it that Abram take a concubine? Sarai's. And who agreed and took on Hagar? Abram. It was their mess not God's.

Did they involve God at that point? Nope. Abram didn't pray; he just transferred responsibility back to Sarai. *'Do with her whatever you think best.'* Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar; so she fled from her.' What a moral coward! Hagar was his wife now. He chose to go along with the scheme instead of paying attention to the alarm bells. He was in a position to be peacemaker between his two wives.

So you've made a mistake. Have you noticed that politicians rarely admit mistakes? Rather than just say "sorry I was wrong" they try to justify bad actions – try to prove that black is white. To heal a mistake, it always involves "sorry, I was wrong." The gospel is based on this principle. We take responsibility for ourselves and our sin when we come to Jesus and accept his offer of forgiveness and eternal life. But it works at all levels of our lives. We make mistakes and we must take responsibility for them, seek God, deal with issues of forgiveness and move on the right way.

Because of Abram and Sarai's idiocy, both in not seeking God and then failing to resolve the issues, a pregnant Hagar ran away. That's when God intervenes and rescues her. . Hagar was given an assurance that God was with her and she returned to Sarai.

We have a gracious God who sometimes comes to the rescue in unexpected ways, turning our minuses into His pluses – no thanks to our stupidity. Abram and Sarai made a huge mistake trying to second-guess God and as Ishmael was born, they had to live with the consequences of their mistake which I'll come to in a minute.

What about the guy who turned down becoming a missionary with MAF? He and his wife were blessed by God for decades as they worked secular jobs and involved with a local church. They found that their son was interested in Christian service and encouraged him to consider his life choices carefully. They thought he would end up in missionary work, but he felt called to Baptist Ministry – it went full circle and God turned a minus to a plus. And of course, when you second-guess God, why not truly mess things up as Abram did and

5 Don't learn from your mistakes

Do you think that Abram and Sarai were duly chastened by their actions? Of course not! They seem to have learned little from the episode and as we fast-forward to Chapter 21 as Isaac is born; they kick the unloved Hagar and Ishmael out of the camp and had it not been for God's intervention again they both would have died. Do you think that impressed Hagar and Ishmael? It certainly didn't.

For Abraham's descendents, kicking Hagar and Ishmael out wasn't the end of the matter as chapter 16 indicates – Ishmael and his descendents were a thorn in Israel's side down the years. Of course, Arabs trace their descent to Ishmael and they are still in conflict with one another.

LIVE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES

Second-guessing God and acting in the flesh and not in the Spirit can have massive consequences – it tears churches apart, it destroys families, it perpetuates prejudice, it perpetuates sin from one generation to the next. And somehow we don't seem to learn. For the items for reflection and discussion this week I'll let you think of situations in the Bible and down the centuries where people second-guessed God and ended up in a truly Abrahamic mess!

The only glimmer of light in this sad story, is that God was still ready to bless Abram and Sarai as well as the much maligned Hagar. We have a God who is loving and gracious – they got their second chance. They got quite a few of them. Is that true for you too? It certainly is for me. God is good!

We have a God and a faith that has redemption at its heart. God was faithful to his promise. And Abraham? Not only did he have Ishmael and Isaac as children, but after Sarah died, he married again and had 6 more children! When God says multiply, He means multiply.

Never limit God by building fences around what you think He can and cannot do: allow Him to open up the possibilities He has for your life, for the life of the church and for the nations. Jesus calls to us "follow Me!" Let's go.

CONFESSION

As we come to prayer, let's come in confession before Him for those times we have been walking outside His will.

Father

forgive us for our lack of imagination as to what we believe You can do with us.

We are sorry for those times when we have limited You and second-guessed your ways.
For the times when you said “follow me” and we didn’t.
For times that required faith and we played safe.
For relationships that we should never have got into.
For relationships that have become broken,
For situations that have become out of control.
For all those times we heard alarm bells and ignored them.

Father forgive us

Thank you that You can and do turn our minuses to pluses.
Help and encourage us to always look to You first and foremost;
to admit our mistakes, to You and to others,
to not jump to conclusions but to listen carefully to You and to others.
To avoid adopting the values of the world and allow ourselves to be
shaped by the media, politicians and the “everyone does it” mentality.

Help us to be slow to anger, quick to forgive.
May we do things in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Father equip us to be people of the Spirit

We ask this in Jesus’ name

Amen.

Let’s take a few moments to bring the needs of the church before God. They are listed on the Weekly Sheet. Please also bring the needs of those who need prayer at this time.

QUIET MUSIC

Father, we bring all these things before You in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Song: Be Thou my vision.

That’s it for this morning. As you should know, next Sunday is our last broadcast service on YouTube. We return to live services at the church at 10-30am on 25th July. Let’s close with this benediction:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Read Genesis 16

1. Think of examples in the Bible of people who acted without properly seeking God? What happened? How did God respond in these cases and what can we learn?
2. Have you ever second-guessed God by just assuming something was God’s will, without really seeking Him? What was the result?
3. Have you ever had the situation where you questioned God about something wrong in your life? How do we get out of situations like this, knowing that we have a loving and gracious God?
4. To what extent has it been true in your life that even though God does rescue us from our mistakes, we still live with the consequences of them?