

Expediency

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Date: 17 September 2023

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[0 : 00] We'll keep that passage open in front of you and we'll spend some time looking at it right away. Let's pray and ask God to help us. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thanks for your word and we pray this morning as we delve into it that you might speak to us clearly and show us how we might live better for you in this world as we wait for the return of our great King, the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Well, a big issue presented before us in this chapter, in Genesis chapter 20, is that of expediency. Abraham puts his wife in harm's way to preserve his own life. Abraham is dishonest about his wife and fails to trust God to protect him and Sarah from harm. And he thinks his plan's wise, he thinks his plan's pretty good. But the question is, is he going to be faithful or is he going to be foolish in what he's doing? I wonder what you think about him.

Do you think he's faithful or do you think he's foolish? Consider the early church. When persecution breaks out and people are being rounded up for their faith, do you stay or do you run if they're going to kill you for your faith?

[1 : 26] Well, moving closer to home, would you quote from the whole of Scripture when you have a whole worldwide audience or only preach what's acceptable to the world around about you for fear of being marginalised or suffering some kind of loss?

For example, let me ask you, what's wrong with this quote, right? What's wrong with this quote? Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve.

If you had a whole worldwide audience, would you finish the quote from Mark chapter 10, 45 and finish it there because it sounds fine and the world would love you for saying it or do you go to the next phrase in the sentence and so represent Jesus more accurately?

Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Now, expediency is the idea of doing what's advantageous and perceived as being more comfortable for yourself rather than doing what's right just when life is likely to be harder if you do.

Expediency is being loose with the truth. That's expediency. Expediency idea of justifying things that might be dodgy for the sake of self-interest and we're all guilty of that at one stage in our lives.

[2 : 59] You might make friends with people who'll help you but ignore those who you don't think can. You might do things that you know what's wrong so as to achieve your desired outcome which gives rise to the slogan, the end justifies the means.

It gets tricky when it comes to ethics. Do you ignore righteousness to achieve a certain outcome? Expediency is the opposite of being principled.

If you're principled, you refuse to help a friend cheat at the cost of the friendship. You stand up for someone who's being harassed or bullied at the risk of suffering as well yourself.

You admit that when you've made a mistake rather than shift blame onto other people. You accept responsibility for making a wrong decision rather than spin the truth to make yourself look better.

If you're principled, you won't lie. You won't tell half-truths to save your own skin. I hate the word spin, let me tell you, because it's used to manipulate truth to conceal deceit.

[4 : 06] That's what spin is. But what do you do then, just push it a bit further, what do you do if the Nazis at the door, right, collecting Jews who you're hiding so as to exterminate them?

What do you do in the face of that great evil? It's not the case of Abraham, mind you. But just in case you're wondering, there is a place for prudence, right, not naivety.

Prudence is acting wise and godly in a situation. Naivety is being foolish, thinking it's godly, right? So in the cold light of day when it really isn't, it's a lack of wisdom and so leads to assessing things wrongly and making a faulty decision and assisting in evil is not morally good.

So when evil knocks at the door, our job is to resist it. Dissembling the truth in the face of evil is prudence.

[5 : 16] Consider what Jesus says in Matthew 10, Matthew 10, verse 16, Behold, I'm sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so to be wise, or be shrewd, as serpents and innocent as doves.

Now the serpent in Genesis chapter 3 is crafty and cunning. And so what Jesus is promoting then is to be prudent by being crafty and turning the sinful desire of the evil one into their own downfall. Now Jesus links prudence together with being innocent, pure in motive. For innocence can become naivety unless it's combined with prudence.

So the bottom line, right, after all this, it's not foolish to be faithful, but it is foolish to be naive.

And so the question before us in Genesis 20 is this, was Abraham being prudent or was he being expedient, faithless?

[6 : 33] Was Abraham acting wisely or was Abraham acting expediently? And the bottom line is that Abraham is not being prudent, he's being expedient, as we'll see.

Which then brings us to the passage, and to get a hold of the passage, we've just got to sort of do a bit of a recap of Genesis so far. The dominant theme in Genesis is the hope of a child being born. We're almost there, we're almost there. A child who defeats Satan and brings salvation to the world. That's the great hope of Genesis. And rescue people from who are under the curse of sin and death and condemnation, and so bring blessing and righteousness and life and forgiveness.

In Genesis chapter 3, after mankind's rebelled against God and so become estranged from God, after Abraham and Eve have listened to the lie of the serpent and so rebelled against God's good rule, Genesis chapter 3 verse 14 says, and the Lord God said to the serpent, because you've done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all the beasts of the field.

On your belly you shall go and the dust you shall eat all the days of your life. And listen to what closely comes then in verse 15. Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, I'll put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

[7 : 51] He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. That verse sets the trajectory for the rest of the Bible.

The hope of a child being born who will then crush the head of Satan. Genesis chapter 12, come forward to there. We've got the number of generations now and none of the children have been born have actually been able to defeat Satan, kill him off.

And we get the promises given to Abraham. In summary, in chapter 12, we've seen them, that there are a land in which you will dwell. You'll have a nation coming from his own offspring and a great blessing to the world through this offspring.

And God has promised Abraham that God will make him into a great nation. But Abraham has no child yet. Then come forward to Genesis chapter 15, verses 1 to 6.

And there's a promise that Abraham have a child. Abraham chapter 15, verses 1 to 6, I'll read out to you. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. Fear not, Abraham, I'm your shield.

[8 : 59] Hear that word, your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abraham said, O Lord, what will you give me for I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus. And Abraham said, Behold, you've given me no offspring and a member of my household will be my heir.

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, this man shall not be your heir, your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him out and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars. If you're able to number them, then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. It won't be a surrogate son, but it'll be a son from his very own body.

Abraham believes God and is credited as righteous. Abraham says, God says Abraham is right with him by faith. Not by works, but by trusting in the very promises of God.

And notice God also says, I'll be your great shield. Don't fear. Don't be afraid. And in the context there, God has just delivered Abraham in a great victory from the mightiest king in the region, we saw King Chetalamea.

[10 : 09] God can protect Abraham and make sure that he and Sarah are the ones who will have a son. The problem is, Sarah hasn't had a child yet.

And by chapter 17, things are getting particularly desperate. Chapter 17 verse 1, Abraham was 90 years old and the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him, I am the Lord God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant between you and me and may multiply you greatly. Then Abraham fell on his face and God said to him, Behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

No longer shall your name be Abraham, but your name shall be Abraham for I made you the father of a multitude of nations. Now coming out of verse 17, you see that Abraham is now 99 or 100 years old and Sarah is 99, at least 90 years old and they still have no child.

And just simply to rub the salt into the wound of Abraham, God changes his name from Abraham to Abraham who will be the father not just of one but of many.

[11 : 24] And so the blessing is in the balance when we come to chapter 20. Abraham and his people have moved from Mamre and are now down the wilderness.

There's a bit of a map up here I hope will come up. Yeah, you can see a bit of a map there. There's, you can see Mamre there and you can see Gera there just in the middle. That's where they end up there, Gera.

You can't see Mamre, but Gera's there. That's where they're going to end up there. They're down south, down in Egypt. They're wandering back up there and he's back up here out into Gera where the action takes place today.

All right. He's sojourned. He hasn't lived there but he's been a visitor there. It's not like he's going to put down roots there. He's a wandering man.

He's living as a visitor in that part of the world. And he puts in place the plan he's used before to try and protect his life. It's almost like a cut and paste, isn't it, for those who remember Genesis chapter 12 of the interaction with Pharaoh.

[12 : 25] And this is the plan, Sarah, he says. Right? This is the plan. Abraham said to Sarah's wife, she's my sister and Abimelech, king of Gera, sent and took Sarah.

So here's the plan. Say that you're my sister. Sarah, we're not husband and wife when it comes to speaking to the authorities in the lands we walk through.

That's the plan. See, Abraham thinks that they will actually kill him. See verse 11, chapter 20, verse 11.

Have a look at verse 11. Abraham said, I did it because I thought there is no fear of God at all in this place and they'll kill me because of my wife. Now, remember back in chapter 12, Sarah is a stunning woman.

She's a princess type woman. And so these people of Gera think it's okay to murder someone, but adultery is not. So what Abraham is doing is using a literal truth, right, that he and Sarah are brother and sister.

[13 : 42] I mean, they have the same father but different mother there, you see in verse 12, to imply an untruth that he and Sarah are not married when they actually were.

And so he's actually being deceitful. It's like taking off the wedding ring, take it off, and saying that we're not married, we're just brother and sister.

But everyone knows, well he knows and she knows, that they're husband and wife. And so now Sarah is taken by the king of Gera, Abimelech.

Now just, Abimelech here is different to the Abimelech we just read about in the reading of Psalm 34. That's about 800 years later.

Abimelech is a very common name before king means my father is king, basically. Okay, so, when Abraham's doing this, Sarah's taken by the king of Gera, Abimelech, and consider the situation for a moment.

[14 : 43] Now Abraham, right, has lost his wife. She's now in the royal harem. And even if Sarah has a child, it will not be a child by Abraham.

And the promises of God are being threatened by the actions of the expediency of Abraham. And yet, God reveals himself for the first time in a dream in the Bible.

And Abimelech's told clearly that he faces death if he touches her. See the verse, verse 3. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man because the woman whom you have taken for she is a man's wife.

He must not commit adultery. Even before the Ten Commandments are given, even before the Ten Commandments that I've even heard of by the rest of the world, there's a universal law engraved

into creation.

There's a sacredness to marriage that must stay between husband and wife. You don't lend your wife to another man. You don't touch another man's wife.

[16:13] You just don't. There's a sacred bond between husband and wife and no one and nothing should come between it.

But notice the scope of this sin. If the representative king is guilty of the sin, then not only will he die, but the people he leads will die as well.

You see there in verse 4. Now, fortunately, Abimelech hadn't approached her yet, has not summoned her to his bed and Abimelech and his people have been set up for a fall by the expediency of Abraham.

But even still, Abimelech has suffered and the place has suffered for all the household have suffered infertility, you see there in verse 17, because of what Abraham's done.

But still in the dream, right, still in the dream, it's made known to Abimelech that God had prevented him from committing adultery. It was God who'd prevented Abimelech from sinning, you see there in verse 6.

[17:23] Yet Abimelech has a choice to make. Return Sarah to Abraham's wife as his wife, obey God's word and live, right, or reject God's revelation and then he and all his people will come out of the punishment of God.

And see here, Abraham's recognised now as a prophet here, in verse 7, a prophet who's already also a priest, one who can intercede for Abimelech, one who can reveal God's word and teach God's word.

And so we then come to a response in verses 8-13. Abimelech tells the people there's, and they have come to fear God. They are very, very, very much afraid, see there in verse 8.

They're greatly afraid. So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things and the men were very much afraid. There is great fear there.

Again, the king recognises the great sin he's potentially committed and then in Abimelech we see rebukes Abraham for the sinner that Abraham is when Abraham had handed over his wife Sarah and she'd been taken off.

[18:37] and there's already been consequences for his sin. The blessing of children had been prevented for everyone. God had closed the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

And Abraham says, but, verse 11, he said, well the reason I did it was, see verse 11, I did it because I thought there was no fear of God at all in this place and they'll kill me because of my wife. Strange that God has promised Abraham protection in Genesis 12 and that God would be his great shield we've read and that he has previously prevailed against the mightiest king in the region, King Chedlamea, but, now he's afraid of Abimelech, king of Gerah and this was the plan that he'd made with Sarah and she suffered at his hands by being led into it by him.

It is evident that there is fear of God in this place though, isn't it? But it's not Abraham who particularly fears God in this instance.

I don't know what you thought but if you're tempted to think the Bible is not true then there's something that would challenge that idea here because time and time again things are portrayed which are not flattering to the characters in it.

[20:07] They're not edited out. Here it's warts and all. It's all there. Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jews is shown to be frail and sinful.

A man who not fearing God so much here. His fail is written in the archives of Israel's history open for everyone to know and everyone to read.

That's not how I'd write up my history of my family but here it is for us to read. And we see Abimelech's blessing. The astounding thing here is that the length Abimelech goes to to assure Sarah's innocence as a covenant made between Abraham and Abimelech.

Abimelech acts graciously. He publicly declares that Sarah is innocent and blesses Abraham with great wealth. Sarah has not been with him.

She's proven vindicated as not having been unfaithful to Abraham. And interestingly enough as Abimelech blesses Abraham God blesses Abimelech.

[21:17] Abraham prays for Abimelech as God said he would exercising the priestly role and this is the first on the Bible where the healing is associated with someone praying for them.

Abraham prays verse 17 and God heals. I'm sure Abraham had prayed for his wife along the way as well but God has chosen not to answer that prayer just yet.

Well the question is what are we to make of this passage? Here's a couple of thoughts. First of all we see that whether someone has ever heard the word of God or not adultery is a great sin. It destroys home destroys societies and God is not going to let it go unpunished.

Even if it's not illegal in our country in our society God will not let it go unpunished. Our world calls it an affair God calls it a great sin. Anyone who's been caught up anywhere near adultery knows the incredible destruction and pain it causes in families and friends and destroys churches.

But in God's kindness God prevented Abimelech from that sin and Abimelech obeyed God's word and was blessed. Let me say if you are tempted to commit adultery God is telling us loudly and clearly not in a dream but clearly from his word do not go down that path repent now.

[22 : 52] Secondly consider Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is the man who knew we know he's right with God right? He's a man we are told believed God and God credited him as being righteous and Romans 4 tells us his faith did not waver considering the promises of God.

he believed God would bring a child from Sarah we're told and yet he's still beset by sin the sin of expediency the sin of deception he is at one level faithless fearing for his own life even as he follows God on his journey to the promised land his fear of men then he works out a plan to actually attempt to save his own life while at the same time compromising his wife and brings into jeopardy God's plan to save the world by him Sarah having a child and yet we know that God still used him for his glory not because he was perfect right?

not because he deserved it but because God chose him now men let me tell you this is not the way to treat women it's not the way to treat your wife putting her in danger or hoping to make your life safe by putting her at risk leading her to lie to save your own skin is absolutely wrong being expedient at the expense of others is not on and know that our sin has flown effects to others that we may or may not even know or see and consider Sarah we're told she's a model woman 1 Peter 3 read about last week one who had a hope in God she's the wife who submitted to her own husband even in his unbelief she did that and she didn't fear what seemed frightening

I mean how frightening would it be to be put into a harem even then she's commended as being a model wife the woman with imperishable beauty and you notice the imperishable beauty of Sarah in 1 Peter 3 the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit something that doesn't diminish with age but something that only gets more beautiful wives it's this quality that's important to emulate and women if you're not married be thankful that you'll never be treated in this sinful way that Abraham treated Sarah it's totally fine to stay unmarried let me tell you and for those who are considering marriage be very very careful make sure that it's someone you can submit to willingly someone who you can trust won't lead you into sin and finally in all through this we see God sovereignly at work revealing himself to Abimelech in a dream protecting Sarah from harm in the harem making sure that no matter what happened against the odds the child that God has promised will be

Abraham and Sarah's precious son the child of promise through whom the blessing to the world will come let's pray our Father in heaven please help us to trust you in your sovereign plans help us to submit to you willingly as our Lord and our God and help us to do things in accordance with your will not our own trusting you to do things even when it seems that expediency would be better for our own sake but doing things that are faithful in your eyes help us not to fear men and to fear the consequences at the same time help us be prudent and not naive we ask it in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

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