

FATHERHOOD – Part Two
ABRAHAM AND HIS SONS: CHOICES
Sermon 7/21/19

A few weeks ago on Father's Day, we talked about Adam and the type of father he was to his sons. Over the next several months I want to look at other father's in the Bible and their relationship to their sons. I'll start today with Abraham or Abram as he was called before the birth of his son Isaac. As with Adam we do not have much written in the Scriptures about the early life of Abraham's two sons. What we do know is this:

God promised Abram a son twenty-five years before He made good on His promise. When he was 75 years old God said that He would bless Abram, make him a great nation, and that He would give the land of Canaan to his descendants. Many years passed and Abram began to wonder if his only heir would be his servant Eliezer of Damascus. But God confirmed that a child would come forth from his own body and that child would be Abram's heir.

But ten more years passed, and Abram's wife Sarai began to grow impatient while waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. Since she herself was barren Sarai suggested that Abram should have relations with her Egyptian maid Hagar in hopes of obtaining a child through her. When Hagar conceived, the relationship between Sarai and her maid became strained and Hagar began to despise her mistress Sarai. Sensing the hostility growing between them Sarai, with her husband's permission, began to treat Hagar harshly so that eventually Hagar fled from her presence.

But the angel of the Lord found Hagar in the wilderness and told her to return to her mistress and submit to her authority. He said the child she was carrying was a son and that she should call his name Ishmael, which means "God hears". Ishmael would be a wild donkey of a man and everyone's hand would be against him and he would live to the east of all his relatives. So, Hagar returned to the house of Abram and bore him a son. And Abram named him Ishmael, as the Lord had instructed. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

Thirteen years later, at the age of ninety-nine, the Lord appeared to Abram again and changed his name from Abram (which means 'father') to Abraham (which means "exalted father" or "father of many"). God promised to make him exceedingly fruitful and to make him the father of a multitude of nations and that kings would come forth from him. God then made a covenant with Abraham to be God to him and to his descendants after him giving them the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. He then instituted the sign of the covenant which was the circumcision of every male living under the care of Abraham.

As with Abraham, God changed the name of Abraham's wife from Sarai (which means "quarrelsome") to Sarah (which means "princess"). God promised to bless her as well and to give Abraham a son by his wife Sarah. He was to call this son Isaac; and through Isaac God would establish an everlasting covenant for him and his descendants after him.

As pleased as he was with the news that God was fulfilling His initial promise, Abraham was concerned about his firstborn Ishmael. So, he said to God, "*O that Ishmael might live before you!*" God responded that He would bless Ishmael and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly.

He also stated that Ishmael would become the father of twelve princes and would become a great nation as well. But Ishmael was not the son of the promise and God would not establish His covenant with him. The covenant was reserved for Isaac. Then, in obedience to God's command, Abraham was circumcised as was Ishmael and all the men born in his household or bought with money from a foreigner. Abraham was ninety-nine years old and his son Ishmael thirteen when they were circumcised.

Shortly after this God appeared once again to Abraham and promised He would return at that same time next year and Sarah would have a son. The next year the promised son made his appearance. When Isaac was born Abraham was one hundred years old and his wife Sarah was ninety. Sometime after Isaac was weaned (about the age of three or four) Sarah saw Ishmael being overly friendly with Isaac in an attempt to get in his good graces. This infuriated Sarah so she spoke to Abraham and demanded that he drive out her maid along with her son Ishmael. She did not want the son of her maid to be an heir along with her son Isaac. (It appears that a change of name from "quarrelsome" to "princess" took a while to influence her heart). And though Abraham was greatly distressed because of his son, God told Abraham to listen to Sarah because it was through Isaac that His descendants would be named. As for Ishmael, God confirmed once again that he would make a nation out of him because he was a descendant of Abraham.

So, Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. After nearly dying of thirst in the wilderness God appeared to Hagar once again and opened her eyes to see a well of water nearby. She filled the skin with water and gave her son a drink. The Scripture then says that God was with Ishmael as he grew; that he lived in the wilderness of Paran becoming an archer; and that his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

The next we hear of Ishmael is when he appears at his father's funeral. At the age of 175 Abraham breathed his last, "*an old man*" the Scriptures say, "*and satisfied with life.*" His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. He was buried with Sarah his wife. Though Ishmael may have interacted with his father Abraham and his brother Isaac from time to time we have no Scriptural record of it. Once Isaac was weaned and Ishmael and his mother moved away from Abraham, we hear nothing of Ishmael's interaction with either Isaac or Abraham until the day of Abraham's burial about 60 years after he left the home of Abraham. It would have been interesting to hear the words of Isaac and Ishmael as they spoke of their father from two very different perspectives – one from a continual and one from a severed relationship.

The Scriptures say Ishmael lived to be one hundred and thirty-seven and did indeed have twelve sons who were known as "princes". It is thought by some that Hagar was the daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt. If this is true it would explain why the sons of Ishmael would be called princes. But it is hard to believe that a daughter of Pharaoh would be anyone's handmaid. What is more interesting is that God said "kings" would come from Isaac and "princes" would come from Ishmael, signifying a subservient role. In any event Ishmael and his descendants settled from Havilah to Shur, which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria. The Scriptures say, "*they lived in open hostility toward all their relatives*" (NLT), just as God had predicted.

As for Isaac, the next we hear of him is when his father offers him as a sacrifice to God. The Scripture says Isaac was a “lad”. The word “lad” means “a boy” or “a young man”. The Jewish historian Josephus says Isaac was twenty-five when Abraham offered him up. According to rabbinic tradition Isaac was thirty-six. Other commentators suggest he was thirty-three. It would be an interesting “coincidence” if Isaac was the same age as Christ when he was sacrificed, because the life of Isaac, from his promised conception to his sacrifice at the hands of his father, closely parallels the birth and sacrifice of Christ.

Though he is not mentioned at the death of his mother, Isaac was thirty-seven years old when his mother Sarah died. The next we hear of Isaac is when Abraham sent his servant back to his country of origin and to his relatives in order to find a wife for Isaac. When the servant returns, we are told that Isaac was living near Beer-lahai-roi in the Negev north of his brother Ishmael and that after the death of his mother he was comforted by his new wife Rebekah. After the death of his father Abraham the Scriptures say that “*God blessed his son Isaac*” (Genesis 12:1-25:11).

So, we have two sons, one is rejected by his father and the other is embraced. One leaves his boyhood home with nothing but a skin of water and some bread while the other inherits the vast wealth of his father. One grows up in a two-parent home; the other is raised by a single mother. Both inherit the promise of God to be fathers of great nations. Ishmael fathers twelve sons who become tribal leaders. Isaac’s firstborn son Esau takes Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, as his second wife. And Isaac’s other son Jacob fathers twelve sons who also become tribal leaders. These two very different tribes will soon be at war with each other, a war that would last for centuries.

As a father, Abraham must have been conflicted. It appears he loved his son Ishmael, but he was told by God to send him away. He was also told by God that Ishmael was to receive no inheritance from Abraham. All his wealth was to go to Isaac. So, he sent him away from his home with nothing but some bread and water. As a father, how do you show your love for your son when you must send him away from your presence and disinherit him all in one day? What kind of father does such a thing? And what must Ishmael think of him? What must Isaac think of his stepbrother Ishmael? Abraham was a man of faith, a man who obeyed the word of the Lord, but he did so at the expense of the loss of his firstborn son Ishmael. A son may grieve the loss of his father, but a father also grieves the loss of his son.

Children have been rejected by their fathers since time immemorial. But it doesn’t appear to be as prevalent in Biblical times as it is today. A child rejected by his father in our day and age is unfortunately not a rare occurrence. Multitudes of children born today are either never embraced by their father from the moment their conception is made known, or they are ultimately abandoned by their father and left in the care of their mother or grandmother. A fatherless child in some areas of society today is all too often the rule and not the exception. And this is unfortunate not only for the child, but also for society as a whole.

According to the latest statistics from The Fatherless Generation (wordpress.com)

- **42% of all children residing in the United States live without their father.**
- **63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes – 5 times the average.**
- **90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes – 32 times the**

average.

- **85% of all children who show behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. This is 20 times the average.**
- **80% of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes – 14 times the average.**
- **71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes – 9 times the average.**
- **75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes – 10 times the average**
- **70% of youths in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes – 9 times the average**
- **85% of youths in prison come from fatherless homes – 20 times the average**
- **90% of adolescent repeat arsonists come from fatherless homes**
- **A study of 13,986 women in prison showed that more than half grew up without their father. 42% percent lived with neither parent.**
- **Living in a single-parent home doubles the risk that a child will suffer physical, emotional, or educational neglect.**

Fatherless boys and girls are:

- **Twice as likely to drop out of high school**
- **Twice as likely to end up in jail**
- **Four times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems**

Daughters of single parents without a father involved are:

- **53% more likely to marry as teenagers**
- **711% more likely to have children as teenagers**
- **164% more likely to have a pre-marital birth**
- **92% more likely to get divorced themselves**

Children living in two-parent households with a poor relationship with their fathers are 68% more likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs. Compared to children born within marriage, children born to co-habiting parents are three times as likely to experience father absence and children born to unmarried, non-cohabiting parents are four times as likely to live in a father-absent home.

- **40% of children in father-absent homes have not seen their father at all during the past year**
- **26% of absent fathers live in a different state than their children**
- **50% of children living absent from their fathers have never set foot in their father's home**

Children who live absent from their biological fathers are, on average:

- **At least two to three times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, behavioral, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and to engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with their married, biological (or adoptive) parents**

These statistics should cause any and all fathers who are thinking of abandoning their responsibilities to rethink their exit strategy. The act of abandoning a child will have a profound effect not only on the child but also on the society in which he lives. His single act of abandonment may well be the catalyst that causes their son or daughter to drop out of school, embrace drugs, gangs, violence, prostitution and a life of crime. Someone could even end up losing their life because of a violent act their abandoned child committed. The act of being abandoned by a father can have a life-long impact and can last for generations unless someone decides to stop the downward spiral.

This is not to say that fatherless children are doomed to live a life of crime or to continually be the victims of their father's choices. Many mothers who have been abandoned by their husbands have risen to the occasion and committed themselves to providing a better life for their children. Working two or more jobs to make ends meet, they keep a strict eye on their children and expect more from them than the selfish acts of their fathers.

Ben Carson, the noted brain surgeon and current head of HUD for the Trump Administration, credits his mother for keeping him and his brother on the straight and narrow. Her strict discipline along with her deep love and belief in her son's abilities encouraged Ben to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor. With only a third-grade education Dr. Carson's mother Sonya prayed diligently for wisdom to help Ben and his older brother Curtis succeed in school. Because of her love and her prayers for her sons, they did not join the millions of fatherless children into a life of poverty and crime. Instead they became a benefit to society; men who stand tall on the shoulders of a hard-working mother who prayed. And God heard her prayers and blessed her sons.

So not all children who come from fatherless homes end up as delinquents, addicted to drugs and enslaved in poverty and crime; yet, as the statistics show, the odds of escaping the negative effects of abandonment are pretty low and not in the fatherless child's favor.

But let's get back to Ishmael, the fatherless child of the Bible. What impact did being abandoned by his father have on Abraham's son Ishmael? Did Ishmael overcome the rejection he felt or did it haunt him the rest of his life? And what about the future generations born to him? Did Ishmael pass down his sense of abandonment to his children and to his children's children as well so that even after his death generations of Ishmael's descendants also felt the loss of a father? Or was Ishmael able to get over the loss of his father and move on to live a healthy and productive life? We'll find the answers to these questions next week as we look further into the life of Ishmael and see the effect the rejection of his father Abraham had on him and his descendants. Today I simply want to close with this.

God has provided a way through faith in Christ to be reconciled to Him. Once separated from our Heavenly Father we have been brought near because of our faith in the blood of Christ to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Upon receiving His grace we no longer need fear His rejection. The Father whom we have come to know and love is a good Father who makes good on His promises. He will never abandon us, neither will He leave us or forsake us. One day we will hear these words, *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (Revelation 21:3-4). There will come a day when we will be in intimate contact with our heavenly Father; and we will

inherit everything He has promised to us as sons and daughters of the eternal King. Of this we can be certain.

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