

FATHERHOOD – Part Three
ABRAHAM AND HIS SONS: CONSEQUENCES
Sermon 7/28/19

Last week we looked at Abraham and his relationship with his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Both were loved by Abraham but only Isaac, whom God called the child of Promise, lived with his father throughout his young life. Ishmael the son of his wife's handmaid Hagar, grew up in his father's home during his early years but was sent away from the home of Abraham at the age of fourteen along with his mother after his step-brother Isaac, the son of Abraham's wife Sarah, was born. God took care of Hagar and her son as they wandered in the wilderness seeking refuge; and He fulfilled his promise to her that her son Ishmael would have twelve sons and they would become a great nation.

But it was a rocky start. Ishmael left his father's house with nothing but his mother, some bread and some water. Though he was the first-born son of Abraham he received no inheritance and no explanation for his dismissal other than Abraham was obeying the voice of the Lord when He sent Ishmael away. As the years passed Ishmael eventually did have twelve sons and they did indeed become a great nation; But children and power cannot take away the sting of rejection, especially rejection from your own father.

Last week we looked at modern statistics to see what impact the lack of a father has on children today and on society itself. As a refresher, here are a few of those statistics.

- 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

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 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, 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

After viewing these alarming statistics, we wondered if Ishmael had suffered the same fate as do modern day sons when they are abandoned by their father. So we closed last week's sermon by we asking these questions: 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? Today we are going to answer those questions and see what affect, if any, the rejection of his father Abraham had on Ishmael and his descendants. I think you might be alarmed by what you hear.

Being abandoned by his father seems to have had a profound and lasting negative effect on Ishmael. The consequences of abandonment ran deep in him and he passed this down to future generations which in turn continued to impact succeeding generations throughout his family line. We know this not from Scripture alone but also from history and what we have heard from his descendants. Because he states it so well I want to quote the author Joel Richardson and his take on the impact that the rejection of his father Abraham had on Ishmael and his descendants. (Taken from "The Return Is Near: Strategic Insights Into the Most Important Moments In History, Joel Richardson, 2011 DVD)

"So now we have this story: Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael is a fourteen year old boy. He's kicked out into the desert but the Lord is faithful. He preserves him. He promises to make him into a great nation.... So we read these things and they're interesting Bible stories but what I'm asking you to do is to put yourself in the position and recognize the fact that in history, in real time, this was a real boy...with real emotions, with a real life..."

"This happened to a little kid named Ishmael. And so what we need to understand is that you have this little boy and...he had a dad. He had a mother. He had a family. He had a life. He had an inheritance. And in one day he loses all of these things. He loses his dad. He loses his inheritance. He's out in the desert. He's on his own. And that brokenness, that woundedness, that rejection that took place in this little child, today, has been passed on to the religion of Islam..."

"What do I mean?...Mohammed, the founder of Islam...claims to be a direct descendant of Ishmael and Muslims, today, view themselves as both the physical and spiritual descendants of Ishmael. And so here you have this story, this incredible event that took place in this child's life."

"Two thousand six hundred years after these events took place, a direct descendant of Ishmael named Mohammed birthed forth a new religion into the world. And what does his religion teach?... It teaches

God is not a father, God has no son. And, thirdly, (it also teaches that) Ishmael, not Isaac, is the heir with regard to the promises of God to the earth. The very things that those issues of rejection and woundedness and brokenness that took place in Ishmael's life were preserved in that line, and two thousand six hundred years later, a man name Mohammed goes into a cave, has an incredibly dark encounter with some sort of spiritual being. It literally chokes the life out of him to where he feels as though he's going to die, three times this presence comes over him and it demands of him to recite.

"On the third time, the words of the Qur'an begin to flow from his mouth. Mohammed, himself, literally believed that he was demon-possessed. He was suicidal. He was terrified...When he came home, he asked his wife to cover him with a blanket until his fear subsided."

Because of what we know from those who claim to be his descendants, it appears that Ishmael carried the weight and the sadness of being abandoned by his Father Abraham all his life. And he taught future generations born in his line to feel the same sense of abandonment. It is amazing what one moment of indiscretion can do; what consequences they can have. With the exception of Adam's sin, there has been no other "one sin" found in the Bible that's has been so felt around the world as Abrahams' decision to heed his wife's advice and have a son through her handmaid Hagar.

Adam abdicated his role as head of his family when he allowed Eve to eat of the fruit and heeded her advice to freely ate of it himself. This one sin required the death and resurrection of Christ to overcome its impact on all of mankind, on the earth, and on the heavens around us. Only upon the return of Christ Himself will the consequences of Adam's sin be resolved. In the same way, Abraham's decision to listen to his wife and have relations with her handmaid was a decision that he and the rest of the world lived to regret. God's plan was not for Abraham to father a child through Hagar. It was always through Sarah that the promise would be fulfilled. Both Abraham and Sarah thought they could fulfill God's plan through their own means. But a seemingly innocent and societally approved solution to their problem ended up causing great strife between the descendants of Hagar and the descendants of Sarah. Until God makes all things new, the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael will continue to be at odds with each other.

What would the world be like today if Adam had never sinned? What would the Middle East be today if Abraham had never heeded the advice of his wife and had relations with Hagar? One can only speculate because free will is and always has been a part of God's creation. If it wasn't a piece of forbidden fruit it might have been something else that tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God. And if it wasn't Hagar then maybe it would have been someone else who would have tempted Sarah to use human means to fulfill God's promise.

But if we were to learn anything about the fatherhood of Abraham and the effects of his actions on his sons it would be this. One mistake, even though forgiven by God, can cause a ripple effect not only in your own family but in the families of all mankind for generations to come. That is, unless you have the ability to forgive and use that forgiveness to move on. Where does that forgiveness come from? It comes from the Spirit tugging at your heart to let go of the past and to embrace the future that God has in store for you.

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was a man of sorrows who was well acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). We don't know when but at some point in his young life Jesus lost his earthly father.

We know that at age 13 both his father and mother went looking for him in the temple at Jerusalem. But when we hear again of Jesus at age 30 there is no mention of his father Joseph, only his mother, his 4 brothers, and his sisters. So sometime between the age of 13 and 30 Jesus lost his father. If Mary had children every two years then it is possible that Joseph could have died when Jesus was as early as 13. But we have no way of knowing. All we know is that Jesus did not have a father when he entered into his earthly ministry.

Or rather I should say that Jesus did not have an earthly father when He entered His ministry. What He did have, and what He relied on constantly, was His heavenly Father. When Jesus said, *“Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28) He knew from which He spoke. His heavenly Father had given Him rest from the death of His Father. His heavenly Father carried His pain and His sorrow. Jesus knew what it was like to lose a father. But He also knew the comfort of a Heavenly Father. He allowed His Heavenly Father to carry the sorrow and the loss of his earthly father so that He could pursue His intended purpose without being dragged down with unnecessary burdens and grief.

My father did not abandon me physically. but he did so emotionally. We were a two-parent household with only one being able to show love and compassion. For years I felt the loss of his love and sought to find a replacement as the song says, *“in all the wrong places.”* But my search ended when I found my Heavenly Father and allowed Him to comfort my broken, empty heart. He taught me how to grieve the loss I felt and how to overcome my grief. He then set my feet on a new path which did not include looking back to the past for love but rather looking to the future for strength and guidance.

As a result the future of my children was vastly changed from what it would have been if I had held on to my sense of abandonment. Instead of passing down my loss, I passed down my gain. Instead of passing down the fatherless direction I had been taught and the limitations I had been given, I passed down a father’s love and the endless possibilities of a future filled with hope.

There was a chair in my house in which my father sat. No one sat in it but him, not even when he was away on business. It was known as my father’s chair. My mother had a chair of her own too. But the difference between my mother’s chair and my father’s was that my mother’s chair was filled with laughter and love. My father’s chair in comparison seemed empty and devoid of life.

When I grew up, I too had a favorite chair which became known as dad’s chair. But in my chair, I held my sleeping babies, rocked my growing kids, and comforted my confused teenagers. I spoke to them from that chair, sang to them from that chair, and listened to them from that chair. My chair was a loving chair. Not because I had been loved by my earthly father; but because I had been taught how to let go of the past by my Heavenly Father in order to know how to truly love in the present. I was not a perfect father. No man is. But with God’s help I was able to change the direction of my family line. You can do the same.

If you struggle with a lack of love from a father know that your heavenly Father understands and grieves with you. He did not place children in families so that they would be unloved by their fathers. He expects earthly fathers to love their children to the best of their ability, even when they are wounded themselves. But a lack of love in childhood need not be a permanent condition. Your

heavenly Father waits with open arms to embrace you, to comfort you and to love you with an everlasting love. The only thing standing between you and your healing is your willingness to forgive. For true healing starts with forgiveness.

We cannot establish a relationship with our heavenly Father without first seeking forgiveness for our own sins. And we cannot expect to restore or at least repair a broken relationship with our earthly fathers if we are unwilling to forgive. Even we whose fathers have long passed from this earth still need to forgive the hurtful things they have done, not for their sake but for our own sake; because until it is released to the Lord (Romans 12:18-19) unforgiveness will keep us locked in a prison of bitterness and resentment. This is not where the Lord wants us to be. These are not the fruits of the spirit we are to manifest in our lives.

But you say, “You don’t know what he did to me or to my mother or to my family.” You’re right. I do not. What I do know is this. Holding on to unforgiveness does not harm the offender. It only harms the offended. This is even more true if the offender has died. There is no one left to hurt but ourselves. While it is true that evil deeds should be reported and people should be held accountable for their actions here on earth, holding on to our unforgiveness will not accomplish that. That is the responsibility of the legal system. It is not our responsibility to hold other people accountable by seeking vengeance for the evil done to us. In Romans, Paul reminds us of what God requires of us when we are wronged.

ROMANS 12:17-21

“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ‘But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Holding on to unforgiveness is seeking our own revenge. In our unforgiveness we hope to hurt the person who offended us, to let them know how much we despise and mistrust them; Even our silence and our removal of ourselves from their presence is designed to have a negative effect on those who have mistreated us. But most often the one who did the unforgiveable takes no thought of us at all. When you really think about it if they took no thought of our feelings when they offended us, they probably care even less about how we feel now that time has passed. (There are those who are remorseful and seek our forgiveness so that a relationship can be restored. But I’m speaking mostly of the unrepentant here; those who show no remorse for their deeds.)

We need to stop believing that our holding on to unforgiveness keeps us free from harm. It does just the opposite. Unforgiveness brings harm to the one who holds on to it, not to the one to whom it is directed. God knows this. That is why he says leave room for the wrath of God. God will repay all the evil ever done to you and me. And He will do a much better and more thorough job of it than we ever could. Our job is not to be overcome by the evil we have experienced, but rather to overcome that evil with good. That includes releasing our unforgiveness and letting God be responsible for exacting payment for the wrong done to us.

We all make mistakes. Some of them have grave consequences which may not be seen for

generations. Abraham made a mistake which seemed small at the time; but as a result, Ishmael was conceived. And even though God promised that Ishmael would become a great nation on his own, Ishmael still felt the sting of being rejected by his earthly father. That sting, that grief, that pain caused him to reject the God of his father Abraham.

Things may have been different if Abraham had not had relations with Hagar. But they also might have been different if Ishmael had been able to forgive. Instead he carried the loss he felt with him all his life and passed down this same loss to his sons and their sons until even now the descendants of Ishmael say, *“God is not a father, God has no son.”*

And they believe the promise of God given to Isaac was stolen from Ishmael; and his descendants must reclaim it for him, by force if necessary. We see this being played out in the Middle East all the time. Ishmael’s descendants do not want just a piece of Israel to call their own. They want the whole land and they want all Jews to be removed from it. Nothing less will satisfy them.

Abraham is known as a man of great faith, the father of all who believe in the resurrection and salvation by faith alone. With a few small blips in the radar Abraham steered a straight path on the road of righteousness. Abraham is an example of obedience and trust under the most dire of circumstances. He loved His God first and foremost and as a result God chose Abraham as the one through whom He would bless the entire world.

Isaac saw this side of Abraham. Ishmael saw it too but rejected it when he himself was rejected. Never again would the God of Abraham be the God of Ishmael. Never again would any father do that to any of his sons. That cruel joke would never be played on him again and neither would it be part of his children’s inheritance. Better to forsake a father who forsakes you, better to reject a God who rejects you, than to live with the pain of that loss.

And so Ishmael closed himself off from all hope of a father son relationship with both his earthly and his heavenly father. What Ishmael in his bitterness passed down to his descendants finally revealed itself through Mohammed who said, *“God is not a father and God has no sons”*, essentially closing off all the descendants of Ishmael from any hope of establishing a father son relationship with the true God.

There was no chair in which Abraham could sit in the house of Ishmael. Where a chair should have been there was only an empty place. In the heart and mind of Ishmael it would never be filled with his father’s loving presence. And the love of his father Abraham which Ishmael once knew would never be passed down to Ishmael’s descendants. Because of his unforgiveness Ishmael was unable to convey the unconditional, sacrificial love of His father’s God. Instead He passed down unforgiveness and bitterness toward any who were outside his own family, but especially those who were descendants of his brother Isaac who inherited what he believed rightly belonged to him. This empty chair continues to haunt the descendants of Ishmael today as it repeats the mantra, *“God is not a father, and God has no sons.”*

If you are a father and have a chair in your house in which you sit, even if it has wheels, you owe it to your children and grandchildren to make it a chair in which love sits; a chair in which the Holy Spirit dwells; a chair from which forgiveness flows; so that, unlike Ishmael, you can pass down

the blessing of God untainted by hurt and anger and loss. Let the chair in which you sit be the chair in which your children see love dispensed freely and unconditionally, as if God Himself were sitting in their father's chair.

Even if you never hear the words, "I'm sorry" from another, it is still your obligation to forgive as you have been forgiven, for the Scriptures say:

EPHESIANS 4:32

"Be kind to one another, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

COLOSSIANS 3:12-13

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

If this message has caused you to think about the kind of father you were, and you find yourself regretting some of the things you said or did, do not be discouraged but rather take courage. Isaiah tells us, *"The Lord longs to be gracious to you and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you (Isaiah 30:18)*. God is in the restoration business. He hears the cries of the broken hearted and heals those who are hurt from self-inflicted wounds. When we seek His forgiveness, He is eager to grant forgiveness to us so that, with our hearts healed and our bitterness removed, we in turn may ask forgiveness from those whom we have hurt. Forgiveness starts with our relationship with Him but then extends through us to those whom we have hurt.

As the son of an alcoholic father, David Meece knew what it was like to desire the love of a father who always disappoints. He wrote a song which I am about to sing, not only out of his pain, but also out of his healing. David sought forgiveness from the Lord for his own sin, but he also sought to forgive those who sinned against him. Unlike Ishmael, he made the decision not to carry the disappointments of the past into the future; to not pass on his sense of abandonment to his children but rather to lay them down at the foot of the cross. Leaving the past behind, David was able to look to the future and all that God had in store for him.

If you have been hurt by a father or have been a father who hurt your children., take a lesson from David and lay your burden at the feet of Jesus. There you will be forgiven, restored, and refreshed. Look not to the past; but look instead to the joy that is set before you as you seek forgiveness for yourself and from those you have hurt. Set your eyes, not on your earthly father's chair, but to the chair in which your heavenly Father sits. It is from this perspective that you can avoid repeating the mistakes your father made and start living as your Heavenly Father expects you to live.

MY FATHER'S CHAIR

Sometimes at night I'd lie awake
Longing inside for my father's embrace -
Sometimes at night I'd wander downstairs
And pray he'd returned but no one was there –

Oh how I'd cry a child all alone
Waiting for him to come home

My father's chair sat in an empty room
My father's chair through all the years
And all the tears I cried in vain –
No one was there in my father's chair

Sometimes at night I sit alone
Drifting to sleep in a chair of my own
When sweet sleepy eyes peer down from the hall
Frightened by dreams they cannot recall –

I hold them close calming their fears
Praying they always will say

My father's chair sits in a loving room
My father's chair no matter what I do
My father's chair through all the years
And all the tears I need not fear –
Love's always there in my father's chair

Sometimes at night I dream of a throne
Of my loving God calling me home –
And as I appear He rises and smiles
And reaches with love to welcome His child –

Never to cry, never to fear
In His arms safe and secure

My Father's chair sits in a royal room
My Father's chair holds glory beyond the tomb
My Father's chair, my God is there
And I am His eternal heir –
Someday I'll share my Father's chair (*original lyric*)
Love's waiting there in my Father's chair (*revised lyric*)

"My Father's Chair" Words by David Meece, Music by David Meece and Dwight Liles,
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