

"Jesus Is My Best Friend (And Sometimes I Scream at Him)"

Genesis 11:27-32

21 January 2024

So, we're starting a new series today, which I've titled "Messy Discipleship." During my sabbatical, I read through the narratives of Abraham and Co. and studied their lives, and as I did that I was reminded just how messy life can be. Families are messy. Marriages are messy. Relationships are messy. Church is messy. People are messy. Everything is messy!

And, people are broken and they can sometimes do some very stupid things! People can be idiots. Like Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob...and us! And, that's why we need the Gospel of Abraham and Co.

So, turn in your Bibles to Genesis 11. The back half of Genesis 11 often gets overlooked as people move from the Tower of Babel to Abraham's call in Genesis 12. People often overlook and fast-forward through this section because it's a genealogy. You know- those passages that you love to highlight and underline in your Bibles! Verses like:

"So and so begat so and so...so what!?"

But, this is God's word. And there is gold to be discovered even in a list of ancient Near Eastern names that you struggle to pronounce. Even in a passage that doesn't even mention God's name! Imagine that! What can we learn about God from a passage that doesn't even mention God? Answer: *enough truth to comfort your heart.*

And, that's what we want to do today. We want to comfort hearts. We want to see bruised reeds and smoldering wicks cared for, just like Jesus, as Matthew says-

Matthew 12:20

"...a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench..."

That's the kind of church we want to be. A place where broken sinners (broken pastors!) can find healing. Because that's the kind of Savior we have. He's gentle. Kind. Merciful. Caring. Gracious. And, you can even find Him in a 4,000+ year-old genealogy full of weird names!

Okay. Genesis 11.

LOOK AT VERSE 27...

Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

Now, doesn't that just warm your heart? You've got 2 paragraphs full of 8 strange names, 2 deaths, 3 marriages, 2 widows, 1 orphan, 1 barren woman, and 1 big move to another country. Why in the world would you ever want to skip over something as glorious as this in your Bible reading?

Okay. I'll admit that on the surface these verses may not give you the warm fuzzies. You certainly won't see them on a coffee cup or a calendar. You might not get goosebumps when you read them. But, you should. Why? 'Cause these verses, though they don't mention God's name, and though they may "seem" boring, they can tell you a lot about God, if you can learn to read between the lines. And, if you do, then you'll see that Jesus is there. You just have to know where to look.

And, what we'll learn about God, if we read between the lines and enter into their story is this-

WHEN YOU CAN'T TRACE HIS HAND, TRUST HIS HEART.

That's what Charles Spurgeon said. When you can't trace God's hand, and you wonder what in the world He is doing in your life, and why He is allowing what is happening in your life, trust His heart. When you are *at a loss*, from *all the loss* you have experienced, you can trust the heart of Jesus.

When you can't trace His hand, trust His heart. Trust that He is the Father of all mercies and the God of all comfort. That's what Abraham and Co. had to do. Now, let me say that right now, at this point in his life, his name is Abram. It will be later changed to Abraham. So, if I call him Abraham now- even though his name hasn't changed- give me a little grace. I'll do my best to say Abram until it changes in Genesis 17.

So, Abram and Co. had to learn to trust Yahweh's heart when they couldn't see His hand. And, if you're new to Grace, you should know that God's covenant name is Yahweh in Hebrew. So, when I say "Yahweh" I'm talking about God, I'm talking about the Trinitarian God we serve: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Abram and Co. had to trust Yahweh's heart when they couldn't see His hand. And, where could they not see His hand? Where did they struggle to see God's hand in their life? Well, their family had experienced 2 deaths- the death of their father Terah, and the death of one of his sons, Haran. And these 2 deaths left an orphan and a widow behind.

* INSERT ABRAM JOURNEY PIC

Plus, they left their home in Ur of the Chaldeans and planned a move to the land of Canaan, but after 600 miles they got tired (like Forrest Gump I guess!), and they stopped in Haran. Then their father Terah died in Haran.

So, this family has seen their share of misery. They have suffered loss. And, then you come across verse 30:

Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

On top of all the trauma and sorrow and suffering, Sarai- whose name will later be changed to Sarah- Sarai is barren. She can't have children. This is devastating for any couple, but especially so in an agrarian society where families depended on having children to help them around the farm. So, Sarai and her husband Abram have been tryin' to get pregnant, but it's not working. They've been to the doctor. Tried all the ways to get pregnant, done all the old wives tales, and used up all their essential oils, but it's not happening.

Of course, if you know the story- *sorry, spoiler alert!*- Sarah will later get pregnant...when she's 90 years-old! Yahweh will eventually cause Sarai to get pregnant. But, she doesn't know that yet. We do. We've read ahead. But, for Abram and Sarai, right now in Genesis 11, after moving 600 miles away from their home and family, after Abram's dad died, they have to deal with this heaviness. No kids for Mr. and Mrs. Abram.

What could they do?

What can *you* do? What if you're in a situation, right now, like Sarai and Abram? What do you do? What if you want kids, but you have not had success? What do you do? You trust Yahweh. You trust Jesus. You grieve, yes. You cry out to the Lord. You scream, even. And, you dream. You hope. And, you keep trusting Jesus.

It's Sanctity of Life Sunday where we celebrate all human life, but especially life in the womb. On this day, we take another opportunity to condemn the great evil of abortion. And, we come alongside and comfort those who have had an abortion or whose wife/girlfriend had an abortion.

And, if that describes you today- if you had an abortion or encouraged your wife/girlfriend to get one- and you are trusting in Christ alone, please know that you are forgiven. You are forgiven of that sin. Jesus has thrown it into the sea of forgiveness. He remembers it no more.

And, one day, you'll be reunited with your little one with zero shame. With zero regret. One day you'll hold that little one in your arms and you'll dance and sing and play. That's the hope of the Gospel. You just keep thinking about that. Keep that sweet reunion in your mind: with you, and Jesus, and your child reunited and experiencing pleasures forevermore at God's right hand.

But, what about those who often get overlooked on Sanctity of Life Sunday? What about the Sarai's and Abram's in the room who are praying desperately to see some positive signs on a pregnancy test? What about them? What do they do?

They do what every disciple has to do with whatever situation they find themselves in: *trust*.

And, you have to remember that *God is good when life is not*. You have to preach that to your heart. Because what Satan wants to do when you are suffering is to try to convince you that God is not good. That's what he did in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. When the Serpent asked, "*Did God really say?*" he was bringing the goodness of God into question.

He wanted Adam and Eve to doubt God's goodness, as if God were somehow holding back on Adam and Eve. And, that's what Satan will try to do with you, whether you're suffering from the consequences of an abortion, or grieving infertility, or the mourning the death of a loved one. What Satan wants you to do is to begin to think that God is not good.

So, you preach Psalm 119:68 to your heart until you believe it:

Psalm 119:68

You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.

We have to rub that into our pores: *"God is good. God does good. Teach me that truth, Jesus. Rub it into my pores, Jesus. You are good. You do good."*

Charles Spurgeon said, *"God is too wise to be wrong and too good to be cruel."*

God is too wise to be wrong, to do anything wrong. He never does wrong. And, He's too good to be cruel, to good to be mean and vindictive. He is wise. He knows better than us when we think we know better. And, He's good. All the time.

So, what do you do when your spouse breaks bad and goes rogue and wants a divorce? What do you do when your spouse wants to leave you and they have no Biblical grounds for said divorce? *You trust Jesus.*

But, what do you do when you're a *pastor* and your wife breaks bad, and goes rogue, and wants a divorce when she has no Biblical grounds? *You trust Jesus.*

What do you do when your wife refuses the authority of God's word, and ignores repeated pleas to repent from the elders of your church, and then later gets put under church discipline, and eventually voted out as a church member? Oh yeah. What do you do when that happens to you and you're a *pastor*? *You trust Jesus.*

You preach to yourself that-

WHEN YOU CAN'T TRACE HIS HAND, TRUST HIS HEART.

That's what I did when the aforementioned happened to me over the past 7 months. And, that's what I'm trying to do. I don't understand what God is doing in my life and family. I can't trace His hand. I'm confused, perplexed. So, I'm learning to trust.

So, let me take some time to tell you what my life was like over the past 7 months after Heather said that she wanted a divorce, and wanted a new life, and wanted to live for herself. It was a Genesis chapter 11 situation for me. Things happened to me and my 6 children that we didn't ask for. That we didn't want.

In short, it was hell. And, it still is. Divorce sucks. It hasn't happened yet. We still pray for her heart to change. But, it looks like it's headed that way. It's hell. And, I've told people that I wouldn't even wish it on the devil. Now, please understand that I'm speaking in hyperbole: conscious exaggeration to gain effect. Of course, I hate the devil. But, to let you know the depth of the pain, how awful it is, I joke that I wouldn't even wish it on the devil. That's how awful it is. I hope you get my point. It's incredibly painful to have your spouse walk away from your marriage. Every nerve ending in your heart is on fire.

And, those of you who have gone through divorce know what I'm talking about. The Bible says in Genesis 1:24 that, *"...a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*

That's why it hurts so much. We're one flesh, but now we're being pulled apart. An arm ripped off here, a leg there, a finger here, an ear there. All this ripping up and separation that's not supposed to happen.

So, my sabbatical this past summer was not a true sabbatical. Right before it started, Heather told me that she wanted a divorce. That was a kick in the gut. I was discombobulated. So, in one sense it was not a true sabbatical. In fact, I joke that it was my "traumatological." It was trauma. A "traumatological." And, I didn't really end up resting like you're supposed to on your sabbatical. Yes, I got a break from the rigors of preaching, but it was not *rest*. I tell people that I didn't *rest*, I *wrestled*.

I wrestled with Jesus for 3 months straight. Every day. Just like Jacob wrestled God in Genesis 32, I wrestled Jesus every day. Now, you need to know something else about my sabbatical. I had decided that I wanted to focus on and strengthen my friendship with Jesus during that time. So, I read 2 books that were very good for my soul:

Friendship with God: A Path to Deeper Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit by Mike McKinley

Friendship with the Friend of Sinners: The Remarkable Possibility of Closeness with Christ by Jared Wilson

These 2 books deepened my friendship with Jesus. And, as I wrestled with Jesus, I kept in mind what may be the sweetest words in Scripture from the lips of Jesus:

John 15:15

"...but I have called you friends..."

6 of the most beautiful words in the English language! Friends! We can be friends with Jesus!

And, because I knew Jesus was my friend, I knew I could wrestle with Him. And, I knew I could even scream at Him. You may have noticed the title of the sermon:

"Jesus Is My Best Friend (And Sometimes I Scream at Him)"

I took Jesus at His word. I told Him, *"Lord, you said that we're friends. Well, friends get in each other's faces. They confront each other. They challenge each other. They even yell at each other. So, that's what I'm gonna do, Jesus."*

And, I did. I yelled at Jesus. I screamed at Him. And, guess what? I didn't get struck by a lightning bolt because I'm standing before you preaching His word! Of course, I took in the fact that God is holy, He is omnipotent, etc. There was no disrespect in my voice, no disrespect in my prayers. There was *honor*. But, there was also *honesty*. Maybe the way we honor God in prayer *is* by being honest?

And, I figured if Jesus is omniscient, and He knows all things, and He knows my own heart better than I do, then He wouldn't be surprised, and He would be big enough to handle my screams, also known as my prayers.

So, I cried out to Him. Asking Him, *"Why? Why is this happening? Why, Jesus?"* Listen, if I had a penny for every time I asked Jesus, *"Why?"* over the past 7 months, I could buy us all a *Tesla*.

I screamed at Jesus saying things like, *"Why won't you change her heart? You're the only One who can do so, so why don't you just do it? If I could, I would. Father, this is your daughter. Why won't you change her heart? Jesus, Scripture says that you are our older brother. Heather, is your little sister. Why won't you change her heart? Holy Spirit, you live inside her. Why won't you change her heart?"*

I screamed those prayers. Guttural prayers from the bottom of my soul. Why? Why? Why?

And, if this seems foreign to you, just look at the Psalms. "Why?" prayers are all over the place.

Psalms 10:1

Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Psalms 22:1

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

Psalms 42:9

I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

Psalms 44:23-24

Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

Psalms 88:14

O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?

That's just a sample. Listen, in the Psalms, God is giving us the freedom to question Him. And, He's actually *inviting* us to scream and yell and pour our hearts out to Him. I think audio Bibles should have a "Scream Feature" where you can actually press a button and hear the psalm being screamed.

And, that's how you have to read these psalms: *"Why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? Why have you forgotten me? Why is my wife leaving me? Why won't you change her heart?"*

That's how you're supposed to pray.

Understand this: *Sometimes faith screams. Sometimes trusting God looks like yelling at Him and questioning Him.* That's what David and Co. do in the psalms. Faith screams because faith screams *at God*. Yelling at God is faith because in faith you are calling on *God* to help and intervene. Sometimes faith screams. So much for having a "quiet time."

Listen, I did not so much as have "quiet times" on my sabbatical, I had "question times." I had "scream and yell times." I asked God "Why?" so much that I think some angels may have whispered in God's ears, *"Hey, Boss. I'm not trying to tell you how to do your job, but could you answer this guy's prayer? He won't shut up!"*

But, sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers. Sometimes He doesn't give us the reasons why he does or does not do something. I don't know why Heather is doing what she's doing and why God is not changing her heart. But, I trust Him.

And, I'm reminded again that Romans 8:28 is real. You've probably heard it a million times, but someone here today needs to hear it for the million and "oneth" time:

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

That's the hope that I'm holding onto. Romans 8:28. And Ray Ortlund captures this truth when he said, *"Reality plays out at two levels simultaneously: human purposes and divine purposes. The two can be opposite: evil and good. But God knows how to get down underneath the evil and reverse it for good."*

That's my hope. God can get underneath it all and reverse it for my good. And, that's why my go-to verse has been this:

Psalms 27:13

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!

There were times over the past 7 months when I prayed, *"I believe; help my unbelief!"* (Mark 9:24). But, there were also times when I honestly said to Jesus, *"I don't believe; help my unbelief!"*

Listen, Jesus is big enough to hear honest, raw prayers. Jesus is big enough to handle all your "Why?" questions. He handled all mine. He let me cry out this summer (and last week!), *"Why? Why? Why?"* And, you know what? Being real, and being raw, and screaming, and yelling, and questioning Jesus actually deepened my trust in Him. And even more than that, it deepened my friendship with Him. Now, I know what Paul means when he says in Philippians 3:10,

"All I want is to know Him, and to experience the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

That's it. I want to know Him more. I want to fellowship with Him in suffering. And, I have. I now know Jesus on a deeper level than I ever have before. I think, in one sense, there is no way to go deeper in some respects of your friendship with Jesus unless you suffer. There are depths of friendship with Jesus that perhaps cannot be reached unless you suffer immense loss, pain, and suffering. This is the "fellowship" or "friendship" of sharing in His suffering.

And, who is our Friend Jesus? The prophet Isaiah tells us:

Isaiah 53:3-6

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

A Man of sorrows. Acquainted with grief. Isn't that what you want in a Savior? One who knows what it is to suffer, and to experience loss, and betrayal, and sadness. One who, as the preacher of Hebrews tells us, *"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence"* (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus knows what it is like to suffer. Jesus knows what it is like to go through hell. Jesus knows what it's like to go through a whole box of Kleenex in one "quiet time." So, do I. And, Jesus knows what it's like, in His humanity, to question God. The Man of Sorrows cried out from the cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Jesus went to the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. It was the ultimate suffering. And, He did it because He loves you. He takes your sin and gives you His righteousness. And, that's why-

WHEN YOU CAN'T TRACE HIS HAND, TRUST HIS HEART.

If you can trust Him with your salvation, you can trust Him with any situation. Let me say that again and think about it: *If you can trust Him with your salvation, you can trust Him with any situation.*

God is sovereign over these 2 paragraphs...and your life. He's working in and through and under the most horrible events of your life.

And, He's great at reversals!

We don't need explanations. We need Jesus. We want explanations. I know that! I feel that! But the lasting peace that we crave will not come from explanations, only from intimacy with Jesus, being friends with Jesus.

And one day, in this life or the next, Jesus will turn our "Why?" into "Wow!!"

Trust Him.

So, hear the promise of the Gospel today, for whatever you're going through:

Matthew 12:20

"...a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench..."

He is gentle. He is kind. He is merciful. And He cares. He really does. Just pour your heart out to Him...and scream if you have to.

Let's pray (scream)...

"Jesus Is My Best Friend (And Sometimes I Scream at Him)"

Genesis 11:27-32

Sermon Study Questions

1. READ Genesis 11:27-32. Where do you see that Abraham and Co. would struggle to trace God's hand as they trusted His heart? Where in your life are you struggling to trace God's hand?
2. Discuss a time in your life when you struggled to 1) trust God and 2) trace His hand, and later you saw what He was doing and how He was working.
3. READ John 15:15 and discuss "friendship" with Jesus.
4. Discuss this quote from the sermon:

Understand this: Sometimes faith screams. Sometimes trusting God looks like yelling at Him and questioning Him. That's what David and Co. do in the psalms. Faith screams because faith screams at God. Yelling at God is faith because in faith you are calling on God to help and intervene. Sometimes faith screams. So much for having a "quiet time."

Does it make you uncomfortable to consider screaming at God? Why or why not?

5. READ Philippians 3:10 and discuss this quote from the sermon:

I think, in one sense, there is no way to go deeper in some respects of your friendship with Jesus unless you suffer. There are depths of friendship with Jesus that perhaps cannot be reached unless you suffer immense loss, pain, and suffering. This is the "fellowship" or "friendship" of sharing in His suffering.

6. Discuss these quotes:

Ray Ortlund

"Reality plays out at two levels simultaneously: human purposes and divine purposes. The two can be opposite: evil and good. But God knows how to get down underneath the evil and reverse it for good."

Charles Spurgeon

"God is too wise to be wrong and too good to be cruel."