

"When A Runaway Woman Named 'Runaway' Named God 'El-Roi'"
Genesis 16:1-16
17 March 2024

Paul Gerhardt was a German theologian and pastor in the 1600's. He wrote many hymns, one that I'd like to read a few verses to you from. It's titled "Give To The Winds Thy Fears" and it's about letting go of our fears and worries and trusting God, which I'm sure we all need to do this morning.

*Give to the winds thy fears,
hope, and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head.*

*Through waves and clouds and storms,
He gently clears the way;
wait thou His time, so shall this night
soon end in joyous day.*

And that's what we'll see in our passage today. So, turn in your Bibles to Genesis 16. We're continuing in our series "Messy Discipleship," and let me tell you what- it's gonna get messy today! Abram and Co. make things really messy. They needed Paul Gerhardt's hymn. They needed to "wait thou His time." But, instead of waiting, they cook up a plan, cook up a recipe for drama. And, it is messy. And, yet, through it all- because God always meets our mess with His mercy- God still moves and will keep His promise to Abram.

What we'll see in Genesis 16 today is this-

GOD SEES AND HEARS YOUR MOANS AND GROANS, AND TEARS AND FEARS, AND VERBS AND ADVERBS.

You know that, I'm sure. But, do you *know* it this morning? Do you *feel* it? Do you really *believe* it. Do you really *believe* that Jesus hears your verbs and adverbs? Do you *believe* it so much so, that you "give to the winds thy fears" and "wait thou His time"? I hope you'll be able to after you see the mess that Abram and Sarai got themselves into 'cause, let me tell you, it is a doozy!

LOOK AT VERSE 1...

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, Yahweh has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May Yahweh judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

So, if you were watching a sit-com on Netflix called "Abram ♥ Sarai", about this old couple that was trying to get pregnant, some words would appear on the screen at the beginning of this episode that said, "10 YEARS LATER." Abram is now 85 years-old and Sarai is 75. We have now fast-forwarded to 10 years after Abram and Sarai had moved to the land of Canaan and heard the promise that they would have a kid. So, they've been waiting 10 years trying to get pregnant, and every single time they get a pregnancy test, they don't see a positive sign. 10 years of negative pregnancy tests.

And, after waiting 10 years, they get a little antsy, and Sarai hatches this wonderful (in her eyes) plan: I'll give my servant Hagar to my husband, and she can have a baby for me. Now, this was a common practice in the ancient Near East. To be barren back then was devastating. You needed kids to help on the farm. So, many cultures allowed this to happen. If a wife was barren, she could offer her servant to carry the child for her. The problem with Sarai's plan, of course, is that this was not God's plan.

So, what does Abram say about this plan? He goes right along with it! Verse 2 says, "And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai." The only other time in Scripture this Hebrew phrase is used, is in Genesis 3:17 when Adam listened to the voice of Eve in the Garden. Interestingly, the same sequence of verbs is used here that is used of Eve in the Garden: *she took...and gave...to her husband*. This is the same progression of verbs that happened when Adam and Eve sinned. I guess the apple really didn't fall too far from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil!

We're supposed to make that connection with Adam and Eve and realize that this is not going to end well for Abram and Sarai. And, we're supposed to be shocked when we read: *Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife*. Sarai gives another woman to her husband to be his wife! I told y'all it was messy! This is a doozy. All of this "wife" stuff and there's one man and two women. It should

not be. This is *not* the way. And, there really is no guarantee that Hagar could get pregnant! What if she was barren too? The only guarantee is a five-letter word that starts with "d" and ends in "rama"- *drama*.

So, this mess is really just Abram and Sarai thinking they can help God out...*as if!* This is Abram and Sarai thinking that God is just taking His sweet ole time, when He should be speeding things up, so they decide to give Him a little push. I mean, can you imagine a person ever thinking that God is moving too slow? Or, that He's not doing things the way you think He should? Or, He's just not answering your prayers fast enough? Or, answering in the way you think He should? I can't imagine that. I can't imagine ever thinking that about God. I have no idea what that is like...liar!

Of course, we have all been here, where we think we could run things better than God. Where God needs our help, needs our wisdom, needs a little push in the right direction. How silly we are! What silly little creatures we are! We actually think we know better than God! I guess the apple really didn't fall too far from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil! It's like looking in the mirror in Genesis 16. If we're honest, we see ourselves.

We're just like Abram and Sarai. We get antsy, and think that we can help God. As if we really know what is best for us. As if somehow, our wisdom is better than God's. It's crazy. It's foolishness. I think God knows what is best for our lives. Even if we have to wait a long time. I think God knows what is best. He created Saturn. When's the last time we created a planet? I think we should go with God on this one... *and on everything*.

I think sometimes we treat God like a little toddler that we're walking with on the sidewalk, and they are taking FOR-EV-ER. It's like God is the toddler who is easily distracted by a flower, or a rock, or stumbling over his own feet, and we're the parents who are in a hurry. "*Come on let's go!*" And, we're getting exasperated and frustrated at this little walking creature who has a mind of its own, and is taking its sweet, little ole time.

That's how we often view God. He's a moseying toddler, oblivious to our wisdom and plans. We think he's taking his sweet ole time. We're in a hurry, He's not. Let me say that again, and rub it into your eyes like soap:

We are in a hurry, and God is not.

Rub that truth into your eyes like soap and let it sting. Because this is reality. This is our reality. This is God's reality. He is not in a hurry, ever, and we are. We need to learn to just slow down and be patient and wait.

The reality is that *God* is the parent on the sidewalk, and we are the toddler who is stumbling, falling down, distracted by the flower, distracted by the rock, distracted by a cloud, turning around and going in the opposite direction. Oblivious. Having a temper tantrum, falling on the ground, crying, wanting our way. We are the toddlers in the scenario, and God is the ever-loving, ever-patient, ever-caring father.

We are the ones who cry out, "*I want! I want! I want this! I want that!*" And God is the ever-loving parent, who says, "*Not yet. Not now. I know what's best for you. Be still. Trust me.*"

I love what Tim Keller said, "*In prayer, God will always give you either what you asked for or what you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows!*"

That's good. God will either give us 1) what we ask Him for, or, He will give us 2) what we would have asked for if we were as wise as He is!

It takes faith and trust and patience to believe that. Abram and Sarai needed faith and trust and patience. So, this is the life of a disciple: *learning to wait on the wise God when He takes His sweet ole time*.

Understand this: Sometimes second turn to minutes, minutes turn to hours, hours turn to days, days turn to weeks, weeks turn to months, months turn to years, and years just keep having years like a very fertile woman.

Sometimes the life of a disciple is just flipping another page of the calendar, and then another month goes by and you flip the page of the calendar, and the next thing you know it's the end of December, and you're buying a new calendar for the new year, still waiting on God. And you flip your way through that calendar 12 times, and then it's time to buy a new calendar. For some disciples, in God's infinite wisdom and care and trust, that is His plan for their life. That was Abram and Sarai. They went through 10 calendars!

For some disciples, you just flip calendar pages year after year after year. But, just because you flip calendar pages, doesn't mean that God doesn't see you, doesn't mean that God doesn't hear you, doesn't mean that God doesn't care. He just has a better plan. And in His infinite wisdom, His plan is to have you flip calendar pages until He answers.

Maybe you're here today and you're waiting for a prodigal to come home. And you're just flipping pages. Know that God sees you. Know that God cares. You just keep praying for your prodigal and flipping calendar pages and

trusting the Lord.

Maybe you're here today and there's some messy relational strain in your life and you want to see restoration and redemption. And you're just flipping calendar pages. Know that God cares about you. He sees you. He hears you. Keep praying. Keep flipping pages. Keep trusting the Lord.

Maybe you're here today and you fill in the blank _____. Whatever it is that you're waiting for, know that God sees you. Know that God hears. Know that God cares. You just keep flipping calendar pages and you keep trusting the Lord. And, with every new month, remind yourself that-

GOD SEES AND HEARS YOUR MOANS AND GROANS, AND TEARS AND FEARS, AND VERBS AND ADVERBS.

Okay back to the story. Sarai *got* this idea, and Abram and Hagar *got* together, and then Hagar *got* pregnant, and Sarai *got* what she wanted. But, not really, 'cause once Hagar's bump started to show, Hagar looked down on Sarai and said, "*Nanny nanny boo boo, I got preggers, but not you!*" The Hebrew word that is used here in verse 4 for Hagar "looking with contempt" on Sarai, is the word for "curse" (that was used in Genesis 12:3). She is cursing her master, putting a curse, not a blessing, on Sarai.

But, what Hagar will soon learn is that Hell hath no fury like an impatient, barren mistress scorned. So, what does Sarai do? She blames her husband! (Of course!) Just like Eve in the Garden, Sarai blames her husband. And, she is correct in that Abe should have said "No!" to this "Go hang with Hagar" plan. Abram should have stepped up as the leader and said, "*No. We will wait on Yahweh another 10 years if we have to. We'll keep buying calendars and pregnancy tests from CVS until it happens.*" But, Abram didn't step up, and now Sarai hands the whole matter over to God, which is what she should have done in the first place.

Then, Abram tells Sarai that she's the one in control of Hagar and she can deal with it. The Hebrew literally reads, "*If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.*" Not really, but Abram knows this is true, so he tells Sarai to handle it whatever way she wants. And, that's exactly what this scorned woman does. She deals harshly with Hagar to the point that Hagar packs her bags and calls for an *Uber* to Egypt.

LOOK AT VERSE 7...

The angel of Yahweh found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." The angel of Yahweh said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." The angel of Yahweh also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." And the angel of Yahweh said to her,

"Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because Yahweh has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."

So, Hagar escapes and she meets the Angel of Yahweh, the Angel of the Lord. Some people think this is a pre-incarnate Jesus appearing to Hagar, but I don't think that's the case. This is an angel, who represents Yahweh, and speaks on His behalf. And, that's what he does. The angel speaks, but it is God Himself speaking to Hagar.

The angel asks her where she came from and where she was going. She explains her situation and then the angel tells her to return to Casa de Abram and she will be blessed. She will be blessed with so many offspring, they can't be counted. The blessing is to be found with Abram, not somewhere else, not Egypt.

Then the angel tells her, "*Tada! You're pregnant!*" The Hebrew uses that word we saw last week- *hinneh* -which means, "look, behold, see." And Hagar replies, "*Duh! I know I'm pregnant. See this bump?*"

But, it's not that the angel is telling her something that she didn't already know. The point is that he's pointing out her situation, the situation that she has found herself in. The idea here with the word *hinneh* then is that God *notices* her situation. God is *aware* of her suffering. He *knows* what's happening in her life. What we may dismiss as just a "normal" verse that points out the obvious pregnant woman in the room, in reality it is just another glimpse into the heart of God.

And, we see God's heart in the naming of her son! He could have said, "*His name shall be Rocky Balboa for he will fight with everyone.*" But, instead, God names him *Ishmael*. The name Ishmael means "God hears." God has heard her cries. God has heard Hagar's *tears*. Think about that: Jesus can hear our tears!

So, all her life after her baby boy is born, every time that Hagar called his name, she would be reminded that she served a God who hears. Every time she said, "*Ishy, time for supper!*" she would remember the time Yahweh heard her suffering, heard her anguish, heard her tears. Basically, she would be saying, "*God hears, time for supper! God hears, please take the trash out? God hears, did you eat a whole bag of chips in the middle of the night?*"

God hears.

Isn't that wonderful? You might wanna tuck those 2 words in your heart this morning. God hears. And, that means that every time you sit down to eat supper, it's proof that God has heard your cry of, *"Give us this day our daily bread"* (Matthew 6:11). And, every time you take out the trash, it's proof that God has *"supplied every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19).

What we see with Hagar is that God is not just concerned with Abram and this gigantic promise of blessing the whole world, blessing the nations. God is also concerned about Hagar, what's weighing down on her heart.

So, you have the "Big plan" of God- bless the nations through Abram. But, you also have God caring for a runaway pregnant woman who was suffering. You have a God who actually "heard" her suffering! How could it be any other way? This is our God. He likes to take care of big and little needs. Does this not draw your heart out in worship? Doesn't this make you want to sing-

*Give to the winds thy fears,
hope, and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head.*

You can carry verse 11- *because Yahweh has listened to your affliction*- you can take those words with you into the darkness, into suffering. Sure, you may not be a runaway pregnant woman, but you serve the same God. You serve the same God whose eyes and ears are attuned to you. You serve the same God who hears your affliction.

Who knew? A passage about a passive and dumb husband, and the 2 bickering women he lives with- one who is bitter and angry, one who is abused and homeless- who knew it could be *the* chapter to give you hope to keep going, because in this gigantic mess you are reminded again that God sees and hears you. Their messiness can become your blessedness.

And, people don't want to read the Old Testament? Oh, my friends, very often what you have is the heart of God just leaping off the pages. You just have to slow down enough to see it. And when you do, you just might start singing an old 17th century hymn.

Listen, if you ever read a passage in the Old Testament, and it makes you scratch your head, or it "seems" boring, or you're tempted to skip it, ask yourself this:

How does this passage show me the heart of God?

You'll be amazed at how you suddenly begin to love the Old Testament. Why? Because you'll start seeing the heart of God.

I think we have grown so accustomed to, and are so familiar with Bible stories, that we fail to see the miracle of it all: *Yahweh hears*. We know of Hagar, but we don't necessarily link her story to the miracle of God hearing *our* cries, hearing *our* suffering. We have read phrases like, *"because the Lord has listened to your affliction,"* but we aren't startled by them anymore.

What a miracle! The infinitely glorious God who created the universe actually pays attention to us and hears our *affliction*, our *suffering*. Even if we're tearless, and we don't utter a word, He still hears our suffering. How crazy that that doesn't shock us anymore! Today would be a good day to be re-shocked that God hears, but not just hears you, He hears your *suffering*. His ears are able to do that- hear suffering, hear pain.

He listens to moans and groans and tears and sniffles and wailing and screaming and crying and broken hearts that feel like they can't beat anymore. You can get all of that out of verse 11. And you can take all the truth that you know about your God from verse 11 with you into any pit, any trial, any suffering, any affliction. And, you're gonna need it when you find yourself there. Take it from me. I'm living this.

And, sometimes there are no words. Sometimes all we can do is groan and that is prayer. Wordless prayers. No verbs or adverbs. Just moans and groans. We see that with verse 11, which tells us that God heard the "suffering" or "affliction" of Hagar. The painful groans of her soul ascended to Heaven. What an amazing thought! Her moans and groans went up to Heaven and the Spirit took them and interceded for Hagar, as Paul says in Romans 8-

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Hagar shows us how to do Romans-8-groaning-stuff long before Paul brought it up. And, why was Hagar groaning? Verse 6 tells us that Sarai was "dealing harshly" with Hagar. This verb in Hebrew means, "to afflict, to oppress, to treat harshly, to mistreat."

And, that's why Hagar ran. I learned this week that that's what Hagar's name means: "to run away, to flee." She lived up to her name. But, God saw Hagar. She couldn't outrun the grace of God, because grace runs faster. God chased Hagar down. God pursued her.

One scholar says there is deep affection in Yahweh's appearing to Hagar. He says, *"...It may be assumed to denote here the affectionate look of him who revealed himself in the angel to Hagar and took her distress to heart."* (T. Booi, "Hagar's Words in Genesis 16:13b," VT 30 (1980): 1-7.)

The affectionate look of Yahweh given to an abused, runaway, pregnant woman. How He cares! How He cares for how we are treated by others! Jesus Himself, in His humanity, in His emotional life as a human being, in His feelings, knows what it is like to be mistreated and abused. Christian, your God is aware of what it is like to be mistreated. He knows what it is like to be abused. To be mocked and ridiculed. To be betrayed. He is not some detached deity who can't relate. He knows exactly how you feel.

Also, remember that there were others following Yahweh at this time: Abram, Sarai, their servants (?), Lot, Job, Melchizedek, etc. But, God saw *Hagar*. He saw "Runaway" running away. And, He sees you. God does not just see one big clump here at Grace Baptist Church, He sees YOU. Your pain. Your sorrow. Your despair. Your heart. You are not lost in a massive crowd. God always sees each of us individually.

Jesus cares about everything that happens to every one of you, every day. And, hears your prayers, always. Tim Keller said, *"There is no unanswered prayer. He hears the desires of your heart and responds to your needs in ways beyond your wisdom."*

This is what Hagar would learn. Though she was suffering, and didn't understand this mess she was in, she could trust that Yahweh would bring good out of it. She could trust that His wisdom would prevail. Yahweh heard her cries, her prayers, her suffering, and was responding to her needs far beyond what she could imagine. Her son Ishmael, too, would be a great nation. Her offspring would be multiplied so much that they could not be counted. Yahweh would respond to her needs in ways far beyond her wisdom, or how she thought her life would play out.

And, God will do that with you too. You may have no idea how God is going to work things out for you. But, your prayers, just like Hagar's will not go unanswered. God will answer them in His time, in His ways. He hears the desires of your heart. He knows what you're thinking, feeling, dreaming, and He will respond to your needs in ways far beyond your wisdom. He'll use His wisdom to respond. Trust me, you want God to answer your prayers according to His wisdom, not yours. He's waaaaaay smarter than we are.

Real quick, let's look at something else. Hagar gives God a name.

LOOK AT VERSE 13...

So she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

The Hebrew of verse 13 is clunky, but it says something like, *"Have I really seen him here who sees me?"* or, *"Would I have looked here for the one who sees me?"*

What Hagar is saying is that even "here" in the desert, in the wilderness, in this desolate place, she has seen the One who sees her. Even in this faraway place, this desolate place, a place she would never have looked for God, she has seen Him who sees her. So, she gives God a name: *El-Roi*. It means "God of seeing." The pregnant girl named "Runaway" named God "El-Roi."

And, Christian, El-Roi is listening to you, too. El-Roi is watching you too, as you get that diagnosis, as your marriage collapses, as you experience betrayal, as you watch every day for that prodigal to come home, as you grieve that broken friendship, as you _____. You fill in the blank and you remind yourself that El-Roi cares, El-Roi sees, El-Roi knows.

EL-ROI SEES AND HEARS YOUR MOANS AND GROANS, AND TEARS AND FEARS, AND VERBS AND ADVERBS.

And, we see that most clearly at the cross. God saw our need and sent a Savior. Tim Keller said, *"God looks at the anxious and says, 'I tore my Son to shreds for you, and you're afraid I will not give you what you need?'"*

Anxious soul, not afraid. He will give you everything you need. So, you-

*Give to the winds thy fears,
hope, and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head.*

"When A Runaway Woman Named 'Runaway' Named God 'El-Roi'"
Genesis 16:1-16
Sermon Study Questions

1. How do the words of this hymn comfort you?

*Give to the winds thy fears,
hope, and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head.*

*Through waves and clouds and storms,
He gently clears the way;
wait thou His time, so shall this night
soon end in joyous day.*

2. Describe a time when you were impatient and antsy and you tried to "help" God (like Abram and Sarai) and it made a mess of things.

3. Discuss what Tim Keller said: *"In prayer, God will always give you either what you asked for or what you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows!"*

4. Discuss this quote from the sermon:

For some disciples, you just flip calendar pages year after year after year. But, just because you flip calendar pages, doesn't mean that God doesn't see you, doesn't mean that God doesn't hear you, doesn't mean that God doesn't care. He just has a better plan. And in His infinite wisdom, His plan is to have you flip calendar pages until He answers.

Describe a time in your past (or present!) where you struggled to wait on God. What did you learn? Did God answer?

5. Discuss this thought from the sermon:

Listen, if you ever read a passage in the Old Testament, and it makes you scratch your head, or it "seems" boring, or you're tempted to skip it, ask yourself this: How does this passage show me the heart of God? You'll be amazed at how you suddenly begin to love the Old Testament. Why? Because you'll start seeing the heart of God.

6. Discuss these quotes from Tim Keller:

"There is no unanswered prayer. He hears the desires of your heart and responds to your needs in ways beyond your wisdom."

"God looks at the anxious and says, 'I tore my Son to shreds for you, and you're afraid I will not give you what you need?'"