

Text: Genesis 16

Title: "The Patience of Faith"

Time: 7/13/08 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In the game of basketball the maneuver called the "pump-fake" is often useful. The object of basketball, if you are on offense, is to put the orange ball through the basketball hoop. If you are on defense, your goal is to keep someone from doing that by staying between the offensive player and the basket and blocking any shot attempt he may decide to make.

That is where the pump-fake comes into play. An offensive player will often pump the ball into the air faking a shot attempt. He does this to entice his defender to jump in the air too soon, and then when the defender is on his way down back to the floor, the shooter can take his jump shot, thereby alluding the defender. To be a good defender, you have to be patient, stay on the floor, and not go for those pump-fakes by jumping too early.

We saw the last time we were in Genesis together that Abram hit a growth-spurt in chapter 15. He experienced some wonderful progress in his walk with the Lord. Here in chapter 16, however, he suffers a costly setback, and he does so because of a lack of patience. It is kind of like he jumps too early; he goes for the pump-fake rather than patiently awaiting the time of God's blessing.

We face that same temptation. Sometimes we are tempted to jump early, to try to address a situation on our own rather than patiently trust God. When we are tempted in that way, we need to be encouraged to have the patience of

faith, and we can learn some important lessons about this patience from Genesis 16.

I. We need the patience of faith when God asks us to wait (vv. 1-3).

Illustration: Now that our hamster has departed our family is contemplating the pros and cons of getting a dog. The kids have been in charge of making sure that we consider the pros, and Maureen has been especially good at reminding us of the cons.

Kara has assembled a list of the first and second choice of a dog for each of our family members, and the consensus seems to be falling along the lines of a yellow or black lab or a golden retriever. I had a dog growing up as a kid, and I can remember that the most difficult lesson I ever tried to teach Sandy was how to obey the command to stay. She always wanted to come along and be included. She never wanted to stay.

Application: Waiting can be one of the most difficult tasks God asks us as His people to do, and we need the patience of faith when God asks us to wait. God often asks his people to wait. Notice the difficulty Abram faced was twofold, and that God was the cause of both of these elements: (1) "Sarai . . . had borne him no children" and (2) Sarai was Abram's wife (emphasized three times in these 3 verses, v. 1, 3).

God is the one who gives life, and God is the one who ordained marriage as an exclusive covenant between one man and one woman. God was in control of the circumstances that Abram and Sarai found themselves in. He was asking

them to wait (it had been ten years after all (v. 3)), and we can expect Him to ask us to do the same thing.

Abram and Sarai decide not to wait, and we see some things that lead to their failure in this regard.

First, they fail to wait by becoming consumed with what God had not done for them rather than thankful for what God had done for them (v. 2). It is when thankfulness dies on the altar of a man's heart that his condition becomes especially hopeless and spiritually dangerous.

Second, they fail to wait by coming up with a solution that required them to disobey God (v. 2). Impatience always leads to disobedience because the only way out of having to wait is to disobey God, who told us to wait. Leupold said of these steps: "Now at this point the evils of polygamy begin to rear their ugly head. It is always bound to be the fruitful mother of envy, jealousy, and strife. The baser elements in man are unleashed by it" (497). When God asks us to wait, we have a choice – wait or disobey. If we choose to disobey, things may seem to go ok for a while, but trouble is ahead.

Third, they failed to wait by abandoning their responsibility to one another. The phrase at the end of verse 2, "And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai," has appeared before in Genesis. Adam listened to the voice of Eve in Gen. 3:17. God has ordained specific roles in the marriage relationship, the man to love and the woman to follow. Here Abram lacks the love that should have protected his wife from this whole mess, and Sarai lacks the submission that should have kept her from leading Abram into the mess. Homes ought to be very cautious about making decisions that are reached by way of a lack of love on the husband's

part, and a lack of submission on the wife's part. We need the patience of faith when God asks us to wait. Rushing ahead puts us on the road to disaster.

II. We need the patience of faith when others treat us with contempt (vv. 4-6).

Illustration: One of our favorite hymns around here is "Be Still My Soul" by Katarina Schlegel. It is a very old hymn that was born in the revivals of the German Pietistic movement of the early 18th century. Revivals produce these rich hymns of the faith. If we are not attracted to them, we are not attracted to the spirit and essence of revival.

"Be Still My Soul" is a song about the patience of faith, and we normally have three verses in our hymnals. Katarina Schlegel actually wrote many more verses for the song, not all of which have been translated into English. One that we do not normally sing goes this way:

"Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,
And all is darkened in the vale of tears,
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,
Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.
Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay
From His own fullness all He takes away."

Application: The patience of faith comes in very handy when friends depart, or when others do not treat us well. We see a lot of ill-treatment in this passage, but not a lot of the patience of faith.

We have Hagar disrespecting her authority, we have Sarai oppressing those under her authority (see 15:13 where the same word describes the oppression of the slaves of Egypt), and we have Abram failing to exercise any authority. Here

is the formula for the destruction of the family – disrespecting authority, using authority oppressively, and failing to exercise any authority or leadership. These ingredients feed on one another and multiply until the whole thing explodes.

What is the antidote? The patience of faith when others treat us with contempt – and this means in the home. Those under authority in the home, do not disrespect that authority. Those in possession of authority in the home, do not abdicate your responsibility, but rather use that authority to lovingly lead, not as a tool of oppression.

Some can have the patience of Job when it does not involve the members of their own household, but when it comes to their own house, watch out. It is often at home where others treat us with contempt, and here especially we need the patience of faith to not respond in like manner.

III. We need the patience of faith when alone in the wilderness (vv. 7-16).

Illustration: My son Brandon enjoyed playing baseball in the town league this past spring, and one of the interesting features of his team was that the shortest guy on their team was also the biggest hitter. The most unlikely member of that roster to be a big hitter, given his relative size, was the biggest hitter.

Application: Hagar is clearly the most unlikely member on the roster of this narrative to be chosen for a visit of the angel of the Lord. Yet the Lord ministers to Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid, so that she can learn the patience of faith as she wandered alone in the wilderness. If God was concerned to personally and tenderly teach Hagar these things,

then God is concerned to teach them to us in the same way as well. Let's see how Hagar learned the patience of faith.

A. Hagar came to understand that she wasn't alone in the wilderness (vv. 7, 13-14).

I had a church history professor who used this phrase of Hagar's, "Thou God seest me," to sum up 1/3 of the whole body of truth that we need to know about God. He used to say, "God is great; God is good; and Thou God seest me. If you know these three phrases, you know everything the Bible teaches about God.

Psalm 48 is organized around that theme (v. 1, "Great is the Lord"; v. 9, "we have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God"; and then in v. 14, "For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.")

God is not stuck in the clouds when we are stuck in the wilderness. He is with us there too, caring for us personally, seeing us, and speaking our name (v. 8). You ever wonder what your name would sound like if God said it? God lives, and He sees (Beer-lahai-roi). This God is our God. Hagar's God is my God.

Before we move on, notice that the angel of the LORD is both Yahweh and distinguishable from Yahweh (v. 11, The angel says, "Because the LORD has given heed" and v. 13, "the name of the LORD who spoke to her"). This is the Old Testament way of teaching the truth we reading in John 1:1, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God."

B. Hagar came to understand that she was headed in the wrong direction (v. 8).

God wants us to always compare where we have been to where we are going. Where were you in your walk with the Lord yesterday, a year ago, five years ago? Where are you going to be tomorrow, a year from now, five years from now? Are you headed in the right direction?

Hagar was not and needed to turn around (vv. 8-9). Where we have lacked the patience of faith and are headed down a path of our own solution, we need to turn around and get back to the difficult place of God's blessing. There is nothing easy about this, but it is the essence of spiritual victory. It is what happens when the patience of faith takes over.

C. Hagar came to understand that God promises a future that is better than the present (vv. 10-12, 15-16).

Application: Ishmael (*God hears*) would not know the subjection her mother was asked to bear. God said he would be like a wild donkey or an oranger, an animal that is slightly larger than a donkey but has shorter legs than a horse. The animal's coloring changes depending on the season. They are generally reddish-brown in color during the summer, becoming yellowish-brown in the winter months. They have a black stripe bordered in white that extends down the middle of the back. They are notoriously untamable. Job 39:5-8 gives the most extended description of this freedom loving animal of the near east.

The point here is that Ishmael would enjoy a glorious future of independence even though Hagar was asked to go back and submit as the handmaiden of Sarai. The future is always brighter than the present for those who live with the patience of faith. God wants us to have eyes to see that bright future.

IV. We need the patience of faith in order to be saved (Gal. 4:21-28).

Application: Paul uses Sarai and Hagar to illustrate the contrast between salvation through the efforts of the flesh to obey God's law and salvation through faith in the promise of God. Leupold said of this Genesis 16 contrast: "God . . . wants it to be clearly understood that the child involved is in every sense to be a child of promise. Yahweh's grace will give him, man can contribute nothing." Where man contributes something to his own salvation, God rejects that effort. It is simply not good enough. Salvation is only by faith in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ died for your sins.

Conclusion: Is the patience of saving faith a part of your life? Have you given up trust in your own ideas and efforts to be acceptable to God? If that faith saved you, does its patience continue to condition your responses to the trials of life – the need to wait, poor treatment from others, the need for faithfulness in the wilderness? Hagar's God is our God. We can patiently trust in Him.

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

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