

Following God's Script to Freedom

Genesis 21:8-21

Sermon Notes by Pastor Stephen Herrod

MESSAGE:

FOLLOWING GOD'S SCRIPT TO FREEDOM

PASSAGE: Genesis 21: 8-21

8 And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. 10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." 11 And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 13 And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. 15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her

voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to

Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. 18 Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." 19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. 20 And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. 21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

MESSAGE GOAL:

The goal of this sermon is to illustrate how God's plan overrides human error, offering hope, healing, and resilience to those who have faced abandonment, rejection, and suffering while encouraging forgiveness and prayer.

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter of her book "Sisters in the Wilderness," Womanist Scholar and Theologian Delores S. Williams offers a

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fresh perspective on Genesis 16:1-16 and Genesis 21:9-21, placing Hagar at the center of attention. Through these narratives, she uncovers the faith, hope, and struggles of African slave women dealing with issues of survival, surrogacy, motherhood, rape, homelessness, and economic and sexual oppression. Hagar's story, often overshadowed by Abraham and Sarah, comes to the forefront in Williams' analysis. Williams emphasizes that the narratives in Genesis 16 and 21 reflect the resilience of African slave women, highlighting their journey through adversity. Delores Williams' profound work humanizes Hagar, an often-overlooked figure in this narrative, and as one who is doing some work centered around childism, I would like to start this sermon off humanizing another character in this narrative who is also frequently overlooked – young Ishmael. Even though he was not the son by which one of the covenants of God was established, Ishmael's birth and existence were still part of God's plan. He grew up in a blended family with his mother, stepmother, and father. However, his stepmother never fully accepted him as her son, and that rejection was made even more evident when she bore a child with his father. One day, at a family gathering they were at the dinner table and Ishmael did like many young boys with brothers do: He made jokes about his brother, and this greatly angered his stepmother. She insisted that Ishmael and his mother be kicked out of the house and made it clear he would not inherit anything even

though that was not a decision she had the power to make. Early Hebrew customs dictated that the eldest son received a double portion of his father's wealth, and the law prevented favoritism toward the son of the wife to protect the firstborn's inheritance rights. Paradoxically, Sarah protected her biological son, but pushed for her stepson to be separated from his father, kicked out of the house, and left with little to nothing. Abraham had a decision to make, because a “happy wife, happy life” is cool until it means kicking out your son that you love. “Happy wife, happy life” is cool until some things are said in anger that cannot be taken back and have scarred you forever. Abraham literally had to choose between his wife and his son. Abraham literally had to choose between two people that he loved in different ways. Sarah was his wife, but Ishmael was his first born. Ishmael may have been Sarah's stepson, but he was Abraham's biological son. So what is he to do? We would've probably told him, just pray about it. That is exactly what Abraham did, but I am not sure that he received the answer that he was looking for. He turned to God, and God told him that in this case, I want you to listen to your wife and let your go, and sure enough, young Ishmael and his mother Hagar was kicked out of the house and Abraham sent them away with food and water to the wilderness of Beersheba, which was not a place for a single mother and her child to be wandering with little to no food, water, or protection. But then again, who am

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I to say that, when it was God who was writing their script?

SERMON POINTS

1. *GOD'S PLANS AND PROMISES OVERRIDES HUMAN ERROR*

Ishmael's reality reflects the challenges faced by many children today. Recent Census Bureau data highlights the fact that only 38.7 percent of African American minors live in households with both parents. And while each of our family's situations are unique, it is clear that Ishmael and his mother struggled. This reality is vividly portrayed in verse 15 when they ran out of water, and she placed Ishmael in the shade of a bush and walked away for a moment, because she couldn't bear to water her son cry and suffer like that.

But friends, there was a word from the Lord for Ishmael, and for that matter there is a word from the Lord to you as well. Here it is: God knew about your wilderness before you experienced it, and yet allowed it for a purpose, and let me use the story of Hagar and Ishmael to show you how. Hagar named her son Ishmael, and the name Ishmael means "God Hears." Little did Hagar know a few years later her son would be in the wilderness crying, and God came to Hagar according to verse 17 and said Hagar, I have heard the cries of your son! Do you see it? Hagar named her son Ishmael which means God hears, but little did she know she would

be in a wilderness with her son all alone as they were left to die, and the tears and groans of her son was heard by God and even though Ishmael did not receive an inheritance from his earthly father, he did receive a promise from his Heavenly Father that I will make you into a great nation. Now let me tell you wherever the abandonment, rejection, suffering, homelessness, poverty, separation takes you is not a place for you to die, but a place for God to re-establish you.

Be not dismayed, there is life after the breakup, abandonment, rejection, fallout, separation, and disappointment. With the Life-giving Holy Spirit, who is as Living Water, you can survive and thrive in your wilderness. God will turn your wilderness into a place of life, vitality, and prosperity. Do not quit when the going gets tough because God will turn your story from a nightmare to a dream come true.

2. *THE BIGGER PICTURE OF OUR LIVES ARE MASTERPIECES*

The Bible records that Ishmael and his mother survived and not only survived but thrived. God eventually dried Hagar's tears away and opened her eyes to surviving on the other side of tragedy, abandonment, mistreatment, and pain. With her God-given insight, she flourished, providing for herself and her son. God also dried Ishmael's tears away and he got on his feet, got a job, found a wife, made a living, and a nation came

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through his seed. Now even though Abraham kicked his son out the house at a young age, and even though Sarah was not the best stepmother to Ishmael and treated Hagar harshly, I can't use this sermon to dehumanize them because they were just being human. Now this does not justify their actions or our actions when we are in the wrong, but it does in a sense explain their actions and our actions. But I am hopeful that from this sermon you will see that God's plan overrides human error, and I want you to consider the bigger picture of your life which is indeed a masterpiece! Given that your life is a masterpiece in the making in spite of the challenges, may you forgive those who messed you over; may you heal from the damage that the messes have caused, and may you marvel at God as God cleans up the mess that has been made and use it to create a masterpiece. You know, one way you know you have forgiven someone who has messed you over is when you pray for them who have persecuted you and have despitely used you.

3. THE GOSPEL OF JESUS THROUGH THE LENS OF ISHMAEL

I can't help but think of Jesus the Christ who went from having everything in His father's house to having nowhere to lay his head on earth! I can't help but think of the disciples and so many others who messed him over, and He found himself in a wilderness of his

own hanging from a tree at Calvary, with his mother looking on. His biological father was not there in that moment, and from the looks of it, I'm not even sure Jesus felt the presence of his Heavenly Father because as he hung there on the tree, he sang a song he learned in vacation Bible school, "My God my God why has thou forsaken me?" And while hanging from that tree, Jesus too, ran out of water and screamed "I thirst!" We don't know if it was the Living Water (Holy Spirit) that he was asking for or if he was asking for H₂O, which is what he created when he brought two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atoms together in the beginning. Nevertheless, He cried out with a loud voice and breathed his last! And the same God who heard Ishmael's cry while under a tree in the wilderness of Beersheba, is the same God that heard Jesus' cry while hanging from another tree at Calvary, and in the case of Jesus, the record shows that three days later God turned a mess into a masterpiece and raised Jesus from the dead. Family, following God's script leads to freedom!

QUOTES BY STEPHEN HERROD

"May you forgive those who messed you over; may you heal from the damage that the messes have caused, and may you marvel at God as God cleans up the mess that has been made and use it to create a masterpiece."

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“God will turn your wilderness into a place of life, vitality, and prosperity!”

“Don’t quit when it gets hard, because God will turn your story from a nightmare to a dream come true!”

“The place that suffering takes you is not a place for you to die, but it is a place for God to re-establish you.”

“God knew about your wilderness before you experienced it, and yet allowed it for a purpose.”