

## Advent Midweek 2 – Ishmael

1. As we saw tonight in our reading from Genesis, after years of waiting for God to fulfill His promise of a son, Abraham and Sarah decided to take matters into their own hands.
  - a. But rather than fulfilling God’s promise, it started a story of pain and resentment.
    - i. Abraham and Sarah were supposed to wait on God’s plan and His timing.
    - ii. In His time, God sent them Isaac, the child of promise.
    - iii. Generations later when the time was right, God sent forth His Son, to a waiting world.
    - iv. Jesus, the true Son of Abraham, makes us all part of God’s family and one of the many sons of Abraham.
  - b. Most of you have probably heard of “Helicopter Parents,” who jump in to rescue their child at the first sign of danger or trouble.
    - i. But I found out through the study connected with this week’s service that there are several other types of parenting that describe a parent’s approach to raising children.
    - ii. One of them is called “Snowplow” parenting.
    - iii. These parents are intent on removing any obstacles in the way of their child, in order that their child does not have to face pain or difficulty on their way to success, just like a snowplow that removes snow to create a clear path – the snowplow parent takes matters into their own hands.
    - iv. It’s different than helicopter parenting because, rather than dropping in when trouble occurs, a snowplow parent anticipates and removes any barriers or discomforts before their child has a chance to encounter them.
2. But are snowplow parents all that different from us in situations apart from parenting?
  - a. Don’t we all tend to take matters into our own hands when something is not quite right or taking too long?
    - i. That’s the situation in which we find Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 16.
    - ii. In just the previous chapter Abraham received the promise that he would be the father of many and that through his descendants God would bless the whole world.
    - iii. In fact, Abraham had been commended for his faith in one of the most important passages of Scripture, “**And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**” (Gen 15:6)
    - iv. Abraham was accounted righteous for his faith, this is one of the foundational verses that establishes that we are forgiven by faith not by our words or deeds.
  - b. But that promise had first been given years earlier and Abraham and Sarah weren’t young when God originally made it.
    - i. They weren’t getting any younger, Abraham was nearing 90 at this point.

- ii. And Sarah was still barren.
    - iii. Maybe they needed to take things into their own hands and force the issue.
  - c. So, Sarah comes up with a plan.
    - i. She offers her servant, Hagar, to Abraham that he might obtain children from her.
    - ii. Abraham listens, and Hagar becomes pregnant.
    - iii. But Hagar, who was blessed with child, began to look with contempt upon Sarah, who was unable to conceive.
    - iv. Hagar's behavior got so bad that Sarah treats her badly in return, which caused Hagar to flee.
  - d. Then in the next chapter of Genesis God makes it clear to Abraham that, despite Abraham's efforts, Ishmael is not the son that God promised.
    - i. God says to Abraham, "**but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.**" (Gen 17:19)
    - ii. Even though Abraham was one hundred years old, and Sarah is ninety.
    - iii. Abraham and Sarah did not have to take matters into their own hands to have a son because God was going to take care of fulfilling His promise in His own way and in His own time.
- 3. When it comes to the blessings and promises of God, we also often think that we have to take matters into our own hands.
  - a. We imagine that we have to activate God's promises by cleaning up our lives or showing Him how sincerely and earnestly we believe.
    - i. That's tantamount to manipulating God by our good works and force His hand to pour out blessings upon us like He owes us something.
    - ii. We become impatient waiting for God's His promises to come to fruition, and rather trust in ourselves to get the job done.
  - b. When we do that we exchange the freedom of the Gospel for the slavery of the Law.
    - i. Rather than living under the freedom of Jesus' words "It is finished!" and trusting that it truly is, we live under the slavery of the Law, which says "Do more! Try harder!"
    - ii. In the Book of Galatians, Paul repeatedly demonstrated the futility of this thinking.
    - iii. In Galatians 3, he writes, "**For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse...Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith' "** (Galatians 3:10a, 11).
    - iv. Ishmael was not the son of the promise. He was the son produced by Abraham's efforts, a work of the law, or Abraham's efforts.

- c. But God called Abraham and Sarah to trust in His promise and live by faith.
  - i. And though it seemed impossible, Sarah gave birth to a son, the son of the promise, Isaac.
  - ii. **“Now you, brothers,”** Paul explains, **“like Isaac, are children of promise . . . we are not children of the slave but of the free woman”** (Galatians 4:28, 31).
  - iii. Those who live by faith, not by works, are also sons of the promise, sons of Abraham, and receivers of God’s blessings.
- 4. It is faith in the true Son of Abraham, the Son through whom the whole world is blessed, the Son whose work sets us free from slavery to the Law.
  - a. Our loving heavenly Father removed any obstacle between us and our salvation because He knew we could never do it on our own, no matter how hard we tried.
    - i. He sent His only-begotten Son into this world and called Him Jesus, for “He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).
    - ii. This Son would also be born through miraculous circumstances, not through an old, barren woman, but through a young virgin.
  - b. Jesus completed the work of the Law, suffered the consequences for our sins and lack of faith, and won our freedom as He declared, “It is finished!”
    - i. Jesus is the true Son of Abraham whose eternal blessings are received only by faith.
    - ii. **“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith,”** Paul writes to the Galatians and to you. **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ...And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise”** (Galatians 3:26–27, 29).